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AND FORMING A COMMENTARY

UPON EVERY BOOK OF

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT;

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED,

AN IMPROVED EDITION OF A TRANSLATION OF

CLAUDE'S ESSAY ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

IN TWENTY-ONE VOLUMES.

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G A L A T I A N S.

MMXLIX.

THE GREAT OBJECT OF CHRIST'S COMING.

Gal. i. 4. *Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.*

THESE words are a part of an introductory prayer, with which St. Paul begins almost all his epistles. The portion of it which I have selected for the subject of our present contemplation, expresses a truth, which, if stated in a didactic form, might have somewhat of a forbidding aspect; but, as incidentally mentioned, in the midst of a prayer which conveyed to the Galatian Church the strongest evidence of his regard for their welfare, it comes recommended to us by all the endearments of Christian love. One thing, in particular, we cannot fail to notice; namely, that the sentiment contained in it was well known amongst them, and universally approved. It needed nothing to confirm it, nothing to enforce it. They were in the habit of looking to the Saviour, as well as to God the Father, for all the blessings of "grace and peace:" and to the one, as well as to the other, of these divine Persons, did they ascribe all "glory for ever and ever." The nature of their obligations, too, both to the one and to the other, they clearly understood. They knew, that to "deliver them from this present evil world," was the Father's object in sending to them his Son, and the Son's object in dying for them.

The introduction therefore of this sentiment would not offend them: on the contrary, it would meet with their most cordial concurrence; and would increasingly occupy their minds, whenever they were engaged in the blessed work of supplication and thanksgiving. Well therefore may the truths which it will of necessity lead me to inculcate be received by you, not as hard sayings, but as expressions of love.

Consider, then, with me,

I. What is the great object aimed at in our redemption by Christ—

Persons at all conversant with the Gospel would, without hesitation, say, that Christ gave himself for us, to deliver us from the guilt of our sins, and from the condemnation due to them. But the complete connexion which that subject has with our deliverance from the world would not so immediately occur to the minds of all. *That*, therefore, it shall now be my endeavour to point out.

Through the fall of our first parents, the world has usurped, in the heart of man, the place which was originally assigned to God—

[The world, as first constituted, and as subordinated to God, was good: but, as rivalling God in the affections of men, it, and every thing in it, is evil. To fallen man it is become his one object of desire, his one source of pleasure, his one ground of confidence. It occupies all his thoughts: it is his pursuit, his portion, and his god. As for his Creator, he flees from him, as Adam did in Paradise. He delights not to contemplate him, to seek him, to serve him, to enjoy him. Nay, if the inspired testimony be true, "God is not in all his thoughts." The things of time and sense engross him utterly. When he rises in the morning, when he passes through the day, when he lies down to rest at night, the world, with its cares, its pleasures, its vanities, binds him as with adamant chains, and keeps him from ever soaring to his God. He loves his bonds indeed, and feels them not: but he is bound notwithstanding; and, whilst "walking according to the course of this world, he is walking according to the dictates of the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in all the children of disobedience^a."]]

^a Eph. ii. 2.

To deliver him from this state was the great end for which our Lord and Saviour came into the world—

[He came to cast out every idol from our hearts, and to bring us back to God. Not that he grudges us the enjoyment of earthly things; for “he has given us all things richly to enjoy^b,” but he cannot endure that God should have a rival in our hearts. By contemplating man in Paradise, we may form an idea what that state is to which the Lord Jesus Christ seeks to restore us. Before sin had defiled the soul of Adam, he had as rich an enjoyment of earthly things as a creature could possess. But he enjoyed God in them: and it was this which rendered them so sweet to his taste. God was the first and last in all his thoughts. He “dressed, indeed, and kept” the garden in which he was placed; but it caused him no anxious care; nor excited any idolatrous attachment in his mind; nor alienated his soul from God, even for a moment. It never unfitted him for communion with God, or deadened the ardour of his affections towards God: no; he walked as before God, every day and all the day long: he walked with God, as a man walketh with his friend. Now, to bring us back to this, is the true end of redemption, and the proper scope of all that God has ever done for our souls.]

Let us now proceed to consider,

II. How great an object this is—

It is the one object aimed at both by the Father and the Son—

[For this the Lord Jesus “Christ gave up himself.” For this he left the bosom of his Father: for this he vacated his throne of glory: for this he assumed our nature: for this he lived: for this he died: for this he rose again, and ascended into heaven, and took upon him the government of the world. This is the end he ever keeps in view, in the chastisements he inflicts, and in the blessings he bestows. In all this, the Father also concurred with him. The very proposal, so to speak, originated with the Father; as the Son himself testifies: “Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not: but a body hast thou prepared me. In burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. *Then said I, Lo, I come,* (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) *to do thy will, O God^c.*” The Father, as is here said, “prepared him a body,” and sent him into the world; and “gave him a commandment, what he should say, and what he should do^d.” The Father

^b 1 Tim. vi. 17.

^c Ps. xl. 6—8. with Heb. x. 5—7.

^d John vi. 38. and xiv. 31.

upheld him also in the whole of his work^e; and “raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory^f,” and committed all things into his hands, that he might accomplish in man all the purposes of his love^g.]

What an object, then, must this be!

[We are accustomed to judge of objects, in general, by the efforts made to obtain them. And, if we take that criterion, what is there that can equal the great object before us? That it should ever occupy for a moment the mind of the Deity, is amazing: but that it should ever be so desirable in Jehovah’s mind, that he should give his only dear Son to effect it; and that his Son, also, should willingly endure all the curses of the broken law to attain it; yea, that the Holy Spirit, too, should undertake, by his own almighty power, to accomplish in us this good work; that the Sacred Trinity, I say, should all combine thus to effect it, exhibits such a view of its importance as nothing can exceed. Yet, how little is it viewed in this light! How little do men, at that season of the year when we commemorate the Saviour’s Advent, recollect for what end he came! If we were to judge by the conduct of the generality amongst us, we should rather suppose that the Saviour gave himself to deliver us *to*, and not to deliver us *from*, this present evil world: precisely as the Jews of old committed all manner of iniquity, and then said, “We are delivered *to do* all these abominations^h.” You well know, that, as by general consent, this is made a season of more than usual conviviality; insomuch that dissipation is, if I may so speak, the order of the day: and the man who has no greater portion than usual of mirth and gaiety seems to himself to have failed in the peculiar exercises of his mind, which the season calls for. If one were to say, that such commemorations were an insult to the Deity; that they obstructed the very ends for which the Saviour came; and were a direct act of rebellion against God the Father, whose avowed will was opposed; one should be thought a gloomy enthusiast, and an enemy to all social happiness. But so it is, whatever ungodly men may think concerning it; and so it will be found at the last day. God says, “Give ME thy heart;” and that command *must* be obeyed. We must withdraw it from all things that stand in competition with him. The most lawful and honourable attachments must be subordinated to him: we must “set our affections altogether on things above, and not on things on the earthⁱ :” we must “have our conversation in heaven.” Our blessed Lord has shewn us, in this respect, how to walk;

^e Isai. xlii. 1.

^f 1 Pet. i. 21.

^g Eph. iv. 10.

^h Jer. vii. 9, 10.

ⁱ Col. iii. 2.

and we "must follow his steps." *In* the world we are, and must be: but *of* the world we must not be, either in our spirit or our conduct. If we will be his followers indeed, we must "not be of the world, even as he was not of the world^k."]

In this subject we may clearly SEE,

1. How few experience the full benefits of Christ's redemption!

[The light of Christianity has certainly raised the tone of morals, where its precepts are heard: but a complete conformity to the Christian code is rarely seen. Where do we find persons living according to the pattern of Christ and his Apostles? Where does the cross of Christ so operate, that they who look to it regard the world as a crucified object, or as a person that was himself crucified would regard it^l? This is a feeling utterly unknown, except amongst a few; who, on that very account, are despised and hated by the whole world^m. The truth is, that Christians in general differ very little from either Jews or Heathens. Christianity occupies their heads; but heathenism their hearts. They pretend to have faith: but, as for "the faith that overcomes the world," they know nothing about itⁿ. Their whole life, instead of being occupied in a progressive transformation of the soul after the Divine image, is one continued state of conformity to the world^o: and, instead of regarding "the friendship of the world" as a decisive proof of their "enmity against God," they affect it, they seek it, they glory in it^p. I appeal to all, whether these observations be not true; and whether those who are "dead to the world" be not "as signs and wonders" in our day? Know, however, that they, and they only, are right; and that all the knowledge, or all the experience, that leaves us short of this, is but learned ignorance, and specious delusion. "The whole world lieth in wickedness:" and "they who are of God" come out of it, even as Lot did out of Sodom^q. "If we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us^r."]

2. How blessed is the effect of real Christianity upon the soul—

[It emancipates us from the sorest bondage; and brings us into a state of liberty and peace. The votaries of this world, see with what cares they are harassed, with what dis-

^k John xvii. 14—16.

^l Gal. vi. 14.

^m John xv. 19.

ⁿ 1 John v. 4, 5.

^o Rom. xii. 2.

^p Jam. iv. 4. See the amazing strength of the original *βουληθη καθίσταται*: the very *inclination constitutes* a man an enemy to God.

^q 1 John v. 19.

^r 1 John ii. 15, 16.

appointments they are vexed ! See them in the full enjoyment of their portion ; What have they ? what, but “vanity and vexation of spirit ?” But, on the other hand, behold the Christian that is enabled to live above the world : his acquisitions cause no idolatrous feelings, like those which the rich man expressed, when he said “Soul, take thine ease ; eat, drink, and be merry^s :” nor do his losses cast him down, or cause him to cry out, “Ye have taken away my gods ; and what have I more^t ?” “He knows how to be full or to be hungry,” as God shall see fit : and “in whatsoever state he be, to be therewith content^u.” His happiness is independent of earthly things. “God himself is his portion, and his inheritance^x :” and death, which is so formidable to a worldly man, is to him an object of desire^y, because it brings him to the full fruition of all that he holds dear. In a word, in him is fulfilled “the will of God the Father ;” and in him is accomplished the purpose of Christ his Saviour^z. Behold this man ! I ask not whether he be rich or poor, learned or unlearned, infirm or strong ; but this I ask, Is there a person who does not in his heart envy him ? I know, full well, that *in words* the generality will reproach him, as a weak enthusiast : but who would not wish, in a dying hour, to be found in his place ? A superiority to the cares and pleasures of life, if accompanied with a suitable deportment in other respects, carries such evidence along with it, as men know not how to reject. They may be ignorant of the principle from whence such conduct flows ; but the conduct itself commends itself to their consciences, with a force which they cannot resist. All in their hearts congratulate the consistent saint ; and though they will not say, “Let me live his life,” they will say, “Let me die his death, and let my latter end be like his.”]

^s Luke xii. 19.

^t Judg. xviii. 24.

^u Phil. iv. 11, 12.

^x Ps. xvi. 5.

^y Phil. i. 23.

^z The text.

MML.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE.

Gal. i. 8, 9. *Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*

TO exercise candour and forbearance towards those who differ from us, is the duty of all : yet there are

bounds beyond which candour becomes indifference, and forbearance treason. In things which are non-essential, and only of secondary importance, we should on no account be rigid: we should form our own opinions, and leave others to follow their own judgment: yea, rather than grieve them by an unnecessary adherence to our own ways, we should conform to theirs, or at least forbear to prosecute our own. This was the conduct of the Apostle Paul. He “bore with the infirmities of his weak brethren^a.” he circumcised Timothy, in order that he might gain an easier access to them for their good^b. “He became all things to all men,” that he might win their souls^c: and rather than prove a stumbling-block to any, by using that liberty to which he was introduced by the Gospel, he would decline the use of meat to the latest hour of his life^d. But was this his practice when he came to things essential? Did he express no concern when he saw the whole city of Athens given to idolatry? Yes; “his spirit was stirred within him,” and he testified boldly against their ignorant superstitions^e. When he perceived that some of the Corinthians were lax in their sentiments and conduct, he told them plainly, that “if any man defiled the temple of God, him would God destroy^f.” Thus, in the passage before us, he, who on other occasions “was gentle among them, even like a nursing mother cherishing her children^g,” was filled with indignation against those who perverted the “Gospel of Christ,” and denounced against every one of them, even though he were an angel from heaven, the most awful anathemas: yea, that they might know the fixedness of his mind respecting it, he renewed his declarations, and repeated his anathemas.

Let us then inquire,

I. What was the Gospel which Paul preached—

^a Rom. xiv. 1. and xv. 1.

^b Acts xvi. 3.

^c 1 Cor. ix. 19—22.

^d 1 Cor. viii. 13.

^e Acts xvii. 16, 22.

^f 1 Cor. iii. 17.

^g 1 Thess. ii. 7.

On this point the utmost caution is necessary. The Apostle pronounces every one accursed that preaches any other Gospel different from that which he had preached to the Galatians. A mistake therefore in this matter will be absolutely fatal to us.

Observe then, that the great doctrine which he insisted on, was *justification by faith alone without the works of the law*. This, I say, was the point which he maintained, in contradistinction to justification by works, or by faith and works together: and this, namely, *justification by faith without works*, was the Gospel which he preached.

Respecting this we can have no doubt, if we consider,

1. The statements which he makes—

[Here let us notice his train of argument, especially in that part of the epistle which accords with a similar statement in the Epistle to the Romans. He observes, that Abraham was justified by *faith*; and that *we* become partakers of his benefits by faith also^h: that the law, instead of justifying, curses and condemns usⁱ: that the prophets asserted justification by faith, in direct opposition to justification by the works of the law^k: and that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, not that we might afterwards be justified by the law, but that we might enjoy his blessings through faith^l. The Apostle then goes on to illustrate and confirm this by the covenant which was made with Abraham. In this covenant God gave to Abraham, and to his believing posterity, the inheritance of eternal life. Four hundred and thirty years after, he gave the law to Moses, and made another covenant with the Jews respecting their possession of the earthly Canaan. This latter covenant therefore, you perceive, was made between different parties; the former being between God and Abraham, (including all the believing seed of Abraham, whether they were circumcised or not,) and the other, between God and the Jewish nation only: consequently, as a man's covenant cannot be annulled unless both parties consent, so the covenant which God made with the Jews cannot supersede that which he had so long before made with Abraham and his believing seed; because the latter party were not present at the making of it, nor had they ever consented to annul

^h Gal. iii. 6—9.

ⁱ Gal. iii. 10.

^k Gal. iii. 11, 12.

^l Gal. iii. 13, 14.

the covenant which had been made with *them*^m. If it be asked, Why then was the law given? We answer, Not to supersede the covenant which had been “before confirmed of God in Christ,” but to shew men their need of that better covenantⁿ, and to serve “as a school-master to bring them unto Christ, *that they might be justified by faith*°.”

Now compare this with the whole train of argument in the five first chapters to the Romans, and the coincidence will establish the point at once. The Apostle there shews our condemnation by the law, and the consequent impossibility of ever being justified by it: from thence he shews the necessity of seeking justification by faith in Christ^p; more especially because that way of justification, *and that alone*, would exclude boasting^q. He then proceeds to establish his point by the examples of Abraham^r and David^s, both of whom sought justification by faith only: and he argues from thence, that if works compose any part of our justifying righteousness, “our reward will not be of grace, but of debt;” and heaven will be, not a gift bestowed, but a compensation that we have earned: and consequently, that *we must “not work”* in order to obtain righteousness, but “believe on him *who justifieth the ungodly*†:” (Mark well, not the godly, but *the ungodly*.) If it be said, that another Apostle represents Abraham as justified by his works^u, St. Paul *proves to demonstration*, that St. James cannot speak of Abraham’s justification before God, but only of the justification, or *manifestation*, of his faith, as true, and genuine; for that Abraham “was justified while yet he was in uncircumcision^x,” which was not only before he offered Isaac upon the altar, but long before Isaac was born^y.

It is needless to prosecute any further the Apostle’s statement: it will be sufficient just to mention his conclusion from it, which is; “THEREFORE *being justified by faith*, we have peace with God^z.”]

2. The objections he anticipates—

[In all his writings St. Paul is careful to obviate the objections which he foresees will be urged against the truths that he inculcates. The objections which he supposes an ignorant person will make, are two: *first*, That if, where sin has abounded, grace much more abounds, we may “continue in

^m Gal. iii. 15—18.

ⁿ Gal. iii. 19.

^o Gal. iii. 24.

^p Rom. iii. 19—22.

^q Rom. iii. 27, 28. (Mark ver. 28.)

^r Rom. iv. 1—3.

^s Rom. iv. 6—8.

^t Rom. iv. 4, 5. Mark these verses, and weigh every word in them.

^u Jam. ii. 21.

^x Jam. iv. 9—11.

^y Gen. xvii. 19, 23, 24. with Gen. xxii. 1—13. ^z Rom. v. 1.

sin that grace may abound^a:" for the greater sinners we are before we are justified, the more will the grace of God be magnified in justifying such ungodly creatures: and, if a person be justified without any respect to his works, then, *secondly*, we may live in sin after we are justified; because we are not under the law which requires good works, but under a dispensation of grace^b, wherein life is given freely without any regard to our works, past, present, or future.

Time will not admit of our considering *how he answers* these objections: (suffice it to say, that he shews they have no solid foundation; and that good works are effectually secured, though they be not taken into the account in our justification :) we mention the objections only, to shew what the doctrine *must be* that gave rise to them. Suppose the Apostle had said, that we were to be justified by our works alone, or by faith and works united, what room could there have been for such objections as these? If works were taken into consideration in the matter of our justification before God, we could have no temptation whatever *on that account*, to neglect them, either before or after we were justified. But if we are justified by faith without any respect to our works, then we can see at once, how a person, not understanding the whole of the Christian scheme, might conceive that the doctrine tended to licentiousness. Indeed these are the very objections that are yet daily urged by ignorant people against the Apostle's doctrine: they cry, 'You need only believe, and you may live as you will: and the more wicked you are, the more will the free grace of God be glorified in saving you.' Persons never think of urging these objections against those who preach salvation by works, whether in the whole or in part; which is a sure proof, that the Apostle did not preach *that* doctrine; but that the doctrine which he delivered was that of salvation by faith without the works of the law. In this view of his doctrine there is *some apparent* ground for the objection: in any other view of it, there is *none at all*.]

3. The perversions he complains of—

[What was it he complained of in the conduct of the Galatians? It was this: that they added the observance of the Mosaic ritual to the duties enjoined by the Gospel^c, hoping thereby to render themselves more acceptable to God. And in what manner does he complain of this? He calls it an introducing of "another Gospel, which yet was not another^d" (for it was a mongrel religion, neither law nor Gospel); or, in

^a Rom. v. 20. and vi. 1.

^b Rom. vi. 15.

^c Gal. iv. 9, 10.

^d Gal. i. 6, 7.

other words, a “perversion or rejection of the true Gospel^e.” Now what ground had he for such heavy accusations, if he himself preached salvation (whether in whole or in part) by the works of the law? On this supposition, the more works they did, the more certain they would be to obtain justification: supposing the Mosaic ritual to be abrogated, there still was no harm in “observing days, and months, and years;” and all that he could properly say to them on the occasion, was, “That they were giving themselves needless trouble:” he must have commended them for their zeal in doing these works; and only told them, that *now* there was no occasion for these observances. But if he preached justification by faith without the works of the law, and saw that they were performing these works in order to secure their justification, then he might well say, “I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain^f.”

Again—We read of heavy complaints against Peter. What had Peter done? He had conversed familiarly with the Gentile converts, and lived for a season, as they did, without any regard to the Mosaic ritual. But when some Judaizing converts came from Jerusalem, he was afraid of offending their prejudices; and therefore he forsook the Gentile converts, and lived with the others in the observance of all the Jewish rites and ceremonies^g. By this conduct, he not only sanctioned the erroneous idea that the Mosaic rites were still obligatory on the Jewish Christians, but that it was necessary even for the Gentile Christians to conform to them. Now this, in any view of St. Paul’s doctrine, was highly blameworthy; because it was imposing a needless yoke upon the neck of the Gentiles. But this was all: and supposing that Paul had preached justification by works, this was all that he could properly lay to the charge of Peter. But supposing, as we have shewn, that the Gospel which Paul preached held forth justification by faith *alone*, then there was abundant reason for rebuking Peter in the presence of the whole Church, and accusing him of subverting the foundations of the Gospel^h, and declaring that, so far as he prevailed, he “frustrated the grace of God,” and made “the death of Christ to be in vainⁱ.”]

We are convinced that, if this accumulated evidence be duly weighed, no doubt can remain upon our minds respecting the doctrine which Paul preached, and which he calls in our text “The Gospel.” Let us then inquire,

^e Gal. i. 6, 7. with iii. 1.

^f Gal. iv. 11.

^g Gal. ii. 11—13.

^h Gal. ii. 14—16.

ⁱ Gal. ii. 21.

II. Why he manifested such zeal in maintaining it—

No man had less of *bigotry* than the Apostle Paul: for, though a Jew, he spent his life in vindicating the liberty of the Gentiles, and, in fact, died a martyr to their cause^k. Nor was he actuated by *resentment*; for, when most blaming the Galatians, he says, “Ye have not injured me at all^l.” Nor was he impelled by *ambition*, as though he would preserve an unrivalled ascendancy over the Galatian Church; for he considered himself as “not having dominion over their faith, but merely as a helper of their joy^m.” His view was to maintain,

1. The purity of the Gospel—

[The Gospel is a fountain of life to a ruined world: nor is there a cistern in the universe that can afford waters so salubrious. It is there alone that Christ is revealed: and “there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we can be savedⁿ.” Now a perverting of this fundamental doctrine of justification by faith alone, is a poisoning of that fountain; and consequently a destroying of the whole human race, as well those to whom its waters flow, as those who dwell in the parched desert. Suppose any man were found so inhuman, as without any cause to poison the spring whereby a populous city were sustained, and from whence alone they could draw what was necessary for their sustenance; would not every living creature execrate him? Yet that man would be innocent in comparison of him who diffuses the deadly doctrines of a mutilated Gospel: for the former destroys only the bodies of men; whereas the latter consigns over their souls to everlasting destruction. No wonder then that the Apostle expressed himself with such vehemence! no wonder that he pronounced every person, whether it were himself, or an angel from heaven, “accursed,” who should dare to “adulterate the sincere milk of the Word^o!” It was on this ground that he resisted with invincible firmness the attempts that were made to get Titus circumcised^p; and it was with the same view that he opposed so strenuously all the efforts of Judaizing teachers, even though they were sanctioned by the examples of Barnabas or Peter himself.]

2. The importance of the Gospel—

^k Acts xxi. 28—31.

^l Gal. iv. 12.

^m 2 Cor. i. 24.

ⁿ Acts iv. 12.

^o 2 Cor. ii. 17. and iv. 2.

^p Gal. ii. 3.

[Many who would shudder at the idea of infidelity, are ready to consider the doctrine of justification by faith alone, either as erroneous, or at best as speculative, doubtful, and indifferent. They will not unfrequently say, 'Take care to do good works, and you need not trouble yourself about these nice questions.' Now I readily grant that there are nice questions relative to predestination and election, and some other points, which may, or may not, be received consistently with our "holding the Head," the Lord Jesus Christ: but this is not the case with the doctrine before us. Justification by faith alone, is the hinge upon which the whole of Christianity turns. If that be practically received into the heart, it will save a man, though he be mistaken in many other points: but a mistake relative to that will be fatal to him, though he should hold every other truth in the Bible. Hear how St. Paul speaks in a passage before referred to; "If righteousness come by the law, then CHRIST IS DEAD IN VAIN^a;" that is, It was in vain that Christ came down from heaven: all that he did or suffered was in vain, "if righteousness (whether in whole or in part) come by the law;" for "all that are under the law are under the curse^r." Again, with peculiar firmness and solemnity he says, "Behold, I, Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing^s." What! was there any sin in circumcision? Why then did Paul circumcise Timothy? No: the act was as innocent as any act could be: but the sin lay, in complying with that ordinance with a view to further their justification before God: and then, it not only did not improve the prospects of the person that submitted to it, but made "Christ himself of no profit to him whatsoever." Once more he says, "Christ is become of no effect unto you; whosoever of you is justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace^t;" that is, Ye have utterly renounced the grace of the Gospel, and ye can no more be saved, than the devils themselves; for CHRIST IS BECOME OF NO EFFECT UNTO YOU. In the Epistle to the Romans he confirms these things, not merely, as in the fore-cited passages, by strong assertions, but by matter of fact: for he declares that the Jews were left to perish, notwithstanding all their endeavours to obtain righteousness by the law; and that the Gentiles, who had paid no attention whatever to righteousness of any kind, were saved: and that the reason of the one being saved, while the others perished, was, that the one embraced the doctrine of justification by faith only, while the others were too proud to submit to it^u. Let these matters be considered; and then let any one say, whether there was not good reason

^a Gal. ii. 21. ^r Gal. iii. 10. compared with Gal. v. 3.

^s Gal. v. 2. ^t Gal. v. 4. ^u Rom. ix. 30—33. and x. 3, 4.

for the Apostle's anathemas, which under any other circumstances might have been justly counted harsh and severe. He felt the importance of the doctrine; and he wished all others to feel it: and therefore he did not hesitate to imprecate curses even on an angel from heaven, if any one could be found blind and impenitent enough to set it aside.]

3. The sufficiency of the Gospel—

[We are far from imputing any evil intention to those who object to the doctrine we are maintaining. "They have a zeal for God; but not according to knowledge^x." They have fears and apprehensions that the Gospel which has been set forth, is insufficient either *to justify*, or *to sanctify*, the soul: and on this account they add good works to faith in order to their justification; conceiving, that the righteousness of Christ cannot be the less effectual for the addition of ours to it; and that the idea of being justified in part by our good works must be an irresistible inducement to the performance of them: whereas the exalting of faith as the *only* mean of salvation, must, they suppose, relax men's diligence in good works. But let us not presume to prop up the ark, or to change the plans which Infinite Wisdom has devised for the salvation of man. "The robe of Christ's righteousness" is quite sufficient "to cover our nakedness^y," without adding to it "the filthy rags of our righteousness^z." And there are grounds enough for abounding in good works without putting them into the place of Christ, and making a Saviour of them. The Scripture is plain; "All that believe are justified from all things^a:" and it is equally plain, that "faith will work by love^b," and "overcome the world^c," and "purify the heart^d." Had the Gospel needed any addition in either of these respects, St. Paul would not have been so adverse to the attempts to improve it: but, as it needed nothing of this kind, he could not endure that we should presume to be wiser than God: "Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty, instruct him? He that reproveth God, let him answer it^e."]

Our IMPROVEMENT of this subject must be short: but we cannot conclude it without briefly noticing its importance,

1. To those who minister—

[It is not within the compass of language to suggest words that could more deserve the attention of ministers, than

^x Rom. x. 2.

^y Rev. iii. 18.

^z Isai. lxiv. 6.

^a Acts xiii. 39.

^b Gal. v. 6.

^c 1 John v. 4.

^d Acts xv. 9.

^e Job xl. 2.

those of our text. Many things doubtless are requisite for a due discharge of the ministry: but there is one that as far surpasses all others, as the sun exceeds a taper. It is this; an acquaintance with this fundamental doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of justification by faith alone. If a man be not instructed in it, how can he instruct others? and if he be not instructing them in this, what is he doing, but bringing down curses upon his own soul, and leading his people also to destruction? Would to God, that those who look forward to the ministry as a source of worldly honour or emolument, would seriously reflect upon this tremendous passage, and consider, whether it be worth their while to involve themselves in such accumulated misery! Would to God that those also who are in the ministry, would consider what they have undertaken to preach, and what is uniformly inculcated in the articles, the homilies, and the liturgy of our Church! But whether men will consider for themselves or not, we must say, “a necessity is laid upon them, and woe be unto them if they preach not the Gospel^f.”]

2. To those who are ministered unto—

[If there be such a necessity laid on ministers to preach “the truth as it is in Jesus,” there must be the same necessity for you to hear and embrace it. Inquire then, what is the Gospel that ye have received? Is it *this*, or is it “another Gospel?” Are your views of the Gospel such as would furnish *occasion* for an ignorant person to raise objections against it as tending to licentiousness? Yet do you, at the same time, manifest by your life and conversation, that it is “a doctrine according to godliness?” Inquire into these things; for “they are your life^g.” If your views of Divine truth do not answer to this description, they are not such as the Apostle Paul had, nor will they lead you where he is. If, instead of looking for salvation by faith alone, you are mixing your own merits with those of Christ, you must inevitably perish: Christ shall profit you nothing. You may build hay, and wood, and stubble, upon the true foundation, and yet be saved at last: you will suffer loss indeed; yet you will be saved, though it be as persons snatched out of the fire^h. But if you build on any thing besides Christ, you have a foundation of sand, which will fail you in the hour of trial, to the destruction of your whole fabric, and the ruin of your own soulsⁱ. The mixtures of your righteousness with Christ’s, like the feet of iron and clay in Nebuchadnezzar’s image, will never bear the super-incumbent weight: they cannot unite; they cannot adhere; if you

^f 1 Cor. ix. 16.

^g Deut. xxxii. 47.

^h 1 Cor. iii. 12, 15.

ⁱ Matt. vii. 26, 27.

attempt to stand upon them, you will fall and be broken in pieces^k. There is but “one faith^l,” but one foundation: “other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ^m.” Take heed therefore that you build upon itⁿ; and let your superstructure be such as shall be approved in the day when it shall be tried by fire^o.]

^k Dan. ii. 33, 34.

^l Eph. iv. 5.

^m 1 Cor. iii. 11.

ⁿ 1 Cor. iii. 10.

^o 1 Cor. iii. 13, 14.

MMLI.

MEN-PLEASERS REPROVED.

Gal. i. 10. *Do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.*

IN the Churches of Galatia, great efforts were made, by Judaizing teachers, to “pervert the Gospel of Christ,” and to establish in its place a doctrine more congenial with Jewish prejudices and Jewish habits. St. Paul set himself vigorously to withstand their influence, and to maintain the Gospel in all its purity. For this end, he declared, in this epistle, his full authority from God to require from all of them a submission to the doctrines which he preached; and he denounced a curse on any creature, whether man or angel, who should attempt to introduce any other Gospel. In prosecution of his argument, he appeals to the Galatians themselves, whether he was, or could be, actuated by any unworthy desire of pleasing men: “Do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men?” In explanation of these words, some would supply an ellipsis here, as though he had said, “Do I persuade (*preach*) the things of men, or of God^a?” Others would translate it, “Do I solicit the *favour* of men or of God^b?” But neither of these interpretations can I altogether approve. The former is that which our translators seem to have acquiesced in; though, rather than express it, they have left the

^a “Dei appellatione τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ intelligit: et πείθειν idem declarat atque τὸ κηρύττειν.” Beza in loc.

^b Doddridge on the place.

passage altogether unintelligible. But if the word which we render "*persuade*" were translated "*obey*" (as it is translated in other parts of this very epistle^c), I conceive that the sense would be more clear. Let it be remembered, that the Apostle, previously to his conversion, had sought to PLEASE men, and, *under their authority*, had opposed to the uttermost the cause of Christ^d. Now he laboured, with no less zeal, to maintain that cause; and denounced a curse, even against an angel from heaven, if one should be found presumptuous enough to oppose it. But was he *now* actuated by the same motives as he was *before*? Did he now *act under the authority of men*, or *seek to please men*? Was he not rather *acting in obedience to God*? It was clear that he was not pleasing men, nor could possibly have any such object in view; because men's wishes were in direct opposition to God's commands, and to the ministrations which he felt it his duty to maintain: and if he would please and obey man, he could not be the servant of Christ.

That this is the real meaning of the passage appears, both from the terms which are used, and from the relation which the different parts of this verse bear to each other. The Apostle says, "Do I *now* obey man^e?" I did formerly; but I do not *now*: "for if I *yet*^f pleased man, I could not be the servant of Christ." Here, you will perceive, the two services are opposed to each other, and declared to be inconsistent with each other^g. And this not only makes the sense clear, but cuts off all occasion for supplying an ellipsis, in a way which one would not wish, and which, in my opinion, can scarcely be justified. As to the text itself, that, in its import at least, is perfectly intelligible: and, in opening it, I shall,

I. Confirm the Apostle's assertion—

We shall have no doubt of its truth, if we consider the grounds on which it stands:

^c Gal. iii. 1. and v. 7.

^d Acts ix. 1, 2.

^e ἄρτι, at this present time.

^f ἔτι.

^g ἀνθρώπους πείθω is put in opposition to Χριστοῦ δοῦλος.

1. The things which men, and the Lord Jesus Christ, require, are directly contrary to each other—

[Men have their maxims and habits, to which they wish all others to be conformed. Our blessed Lord, on the contrary, says, “Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may know what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God^h.” But this is not all: he commands us, not only to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but also rather to reprove themⁱ.” Now, the separation alone is, of itself, sufficiently displeasing to the world, because it forms a tacit reprehension of their ways: but, when to this is added a testimony borne against their ways as evil, they are irritated and incensed; and, in *self-defence*, they brand their opponents with every term of ignominy and reproach. Our blessed Lord found it so with respect to himself: “The world cannot hate you,” said he to his unbelieving brethren; “but me it hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil^k.” And he has taught us to expect the same treatment on precisely the same ground: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you^l.”]

2. There is no possibility of reconciling them—

[Our blessed Lord has placed this beyond a doubt: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon^m.” This is the very foundation of that separation from the world, which is the bounden duty of every one that calls himself “a servant of Christ.” “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?” “*Wherefore* come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lordⁿ.” In truth, this is nothing but what must commend itself to every considerate mind. St. Paul appealed respecting it to the whole Church of Rome, and, in fact, to the whole world: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey^o?” It may be said, perhaps, that the services of God and Mammon are not so irreconcilable as we represent them; since our Lord himself has shewn us that they may be reconciled. In one place

^h Rom. xii. 2.

ⁱ Eph. v. 11.

^k John vii. 7.

^l John xv. 19.

^m Matt. vi. 24.

ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.

^o Rom. vi. 16.

he says, "He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad^p:" and in another place he says, "He that is not against us, is for us^q:" and therefore he may, in this latter passage, be said to have modified and tempered the severer language of the former. But there is no real opposition between the two passages: for if the occasions on which they were spoken be duly marked, it will be found that the former passage forbids neutrality in our own conduct; the latter forbids uncharitableness in judging of the conduct of others. Strong as are the declarations of our Lord and of St. Paul, which have been before cited, they fall far short of that which is spoken by St. James. From them we see that *neutrality is treason*, in reference to God, just as it would be in an earthly kingdom, where a subject would not move to repel an invading enemy. But St. James declares, that even *a wish* to preserve friendship with the world is nothing less than a direct act of rebellion against God. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be (*wishes to be*) the friend of the world, is (*is thereby constituted*) the enemy of God^r."

On these grounds I conceive that the Apostle's assertion admits not of the smallest doubt; but is plain, direct, and incontrovertible.]

Let me now, then,

II. Shew the bearing it should have on our life and conversation—

It is of great importance for us to remember, that broad and unqualified assertions may easily be perverted, to the establishment of principles which, in reality, are false; and to the encouragement of conduct which is essentially unbecoming. It is the part of sound wisdom to make those discriminations, which will serve to guide an humble and conscientious Christian to an adjustment of contending claims, and to a discernment of the path of duty in difficult and conflicting circumstances. With a view to this, I will point out,

1. Negatively, what effect this assertion should not produce—

[It should not render us *indifferent* to the opinions or feelings of those around us. Indifference to the feelings of

^p Matt. xii. 30.

^q Luke ix. 50.

^r Jam. iv. 4. the Greek.

others is highly criminal: it argues a want of love; without which divine principle, whatever a man may have, he is no better than "sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal^s." Those around us have immortal souls, for which we ought to be tenderly concerned: and, as they must of necessity be more or less affected by our conduct, and have their estimate of our principles influenced by the fruits which they produce, it becomes us, *for their sakes*, to avoid casting any stumbling-block before them, or giving them any unnecessary offence. We should, as far as possible, "prevent even our good from being evil spoken of^t." Nay further; we should endeavour to "please men," yea, to "please all men." "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification: for even Christ pleased not himself^u." Nay, I go further still, and say, that we ought to be ready to make considerable sacrifices for this very end: for St. Paul, speaking on this very subject, says, "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God: even as I *please all men in all things*, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved^x." Now, this is a point on which religious people, and young people especially, need to be put upon their guard. There is a *self-will*, and *self-pleasing*, in religious matters, as well as in things unconnected with religion: and there is a disposition to magnify the importance of matters that are indifferent, and to urge the claims of *conscience* for things which are really dictated only by *inclination*, and an undue pertinacity in these things frequently proves a greater stumbling-block to our friends and relatives, than a firm adherence to any positive duty would do. Still, however, I must guard this on the other hand; and say, that, in any concessions which we may make, we must look well to our motives, which none but God can see. We must not comply with the wishes or solicitations of men, *merely* to please them, or to avoid exciting their displeasure: we must do it simply "for their good to edification." This was the Apostle's motive, in all his compliances: "Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, *that I might gain the more*: unto the Jews I became as a Jew, *that I might gain the Jews*; to them that are under the law, as under the law, *that I might gain them that are under the law*; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) *that I might gain them that are without law*: to the weak, became I as weak, *that I might gain the weak*: I am made all things to all men, *that I might by all means save some*. And this I do (not for my own

^s 1 Cor. xiii. 1.^t Rom. xiv. 16.^u Rom. xv. 2, 3.^x 1 Cor. x. 32, 33.

sake, but) *for the Gospel's sake*, that I might be partaker thereof with you^y." Let this distinction be kept in view, and this principle be in operation, and we shall not materially err, either by pertinacity on the one hand, or by compliance on the other.

It may be said, that this mode of proceeding will make a Christian's conduct extremely difficult and unnecessarily dangerous; and that it will be better to adhere to the broad line altogether, and to wave all consideration except for the good of our own souls. But to this I can by no means accede. I agree that this would be far *easier*, and in some respects *safer*: but I cannot therefore say that it is *better*. It may be right to incur both difficulty and danger *for the good* of others; though it would not be right to incur them merely *for their gratification*. It would be right to expose our own lives to a tempest in a small boat for the sake of saving a shipwrecked crew, when it would be highly criminal to do so for the amusement of those on shore: and, if we do subject ourselves both to difficulty and a measure of danger for *the everlasting salvation* of others, we may expect the Divine protection and blessing in our endeavours. Let us but serve our God *according to his directions*, and we need not fear but that "he will give his angels charge over us, to keep us in all our ways."]

2. Positively, what effect this assertion should produce—

[It must lead us to adopt a decided part, and never to swerve from the path of duty, even if the whole world should be against us. The conduct of the Apostles should be ours, whenever such an alternative is presented to us: "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye;" for we cannot but do the things which our God requires^z. We must be very careful to examine what the path of duty is; but, having ascertained it, we must not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, on any account whatever. We must not deviate from the path of duty, in a way either of commission or of omission. Suppose it said to us, as to the Hebrew Youths, 'Bow down to this idol, or thou shalt go into the fiery furnace;' we should not hesitate to choose the fire in preference to the sin. Or if it were said, as to Daniel, 'Forbear to pray to thy God, or thou shalt be cast into the den of lions^a;' we should not hesitate to prefer the den of lions, to an abandonment of an acknowledged duty: nay, we should not even *appear* to concede the point; but should serve God openly, and at all events^b. As far as our Lord and the world

^y 1 Cor. ix. 19—23. ^z Acts iv. 19, 20. ^a Dan. iii. ^b Dan. vi.

go together, we should follow the world: but where they separate, we should let all men see “whose we are, and whom we serve.”]

Now, in this subject we may SEE,

1. Matter for serious inquiry—

[“Do I *yet* please men?” This has been the habit of us all in former times: for the unconverted man has no higher principle of action than this. But, if we have been truly converted unto God, we have given ourselves up to another Master, even Christ; and to serve and please *him* is our chief, our only, aim. We must have no *will*, no *way*, but his. For him must we both live and die.

Well do I know, that our change, in this respect, is often imputed to us for evil; and that we are deemed weak, conceited, and fanatical, because we presume to judge for ourselves in this particular. But where eternity is at stake, how can we do otherwise? We must approve ourselves to God, and to our own conscience. In no other way can we have peace: in no other way can we ever attain to glory.

And I cannot but say, that in what the world demand at our hands, they are very unreasonable. For they will not mete to us what they expect us to measure to them. They will not be persuaded by *us* to do the smallest thing for God, and for their own souls. If, to please us, they read a book which we put into their hands, or attend upon a ministry which we have recommended, they think they make mighty concessions; though, in the daily habit of their minds, they are as much addicted to the world as others: but there are no bounds to the concessions which they require of us: nor are they ever satisfied, till they have drawn us into the same vortex with themselves. I must therefore recommend extreme caution in carrying into effect the very advice which I myself have given. For though to please all men is a legitimate and becoming object of pursuit, if you have attained it you will have great reason to suspect yourselves: for you will have attained what neither our Lord nor his Apostles ever did, or ever could. If “all men speak well of you,” you may be perfectly assured that you have been unfaithful to your God, and that nothing but a woe attends you^c.]

2. Matter for unceasing consolation—

[It is extremely painful to have our friends and relations displeased with us, as they assuredly will be, if we give up ourselves unreservedly to the Lord. Our blessed Lord has told us, that, though this was not *the end* of his coming, it is,

^c Luke vi. 26.

and will be, the effect: "I am come," says he, "to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against the mother, and the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law: and a man's foes shall be those of his own household^d." But then we should ask ourselves, "Have I, like Enoch, this testimony, that I have pleased God^e?" If I have, I am satisfied. I would most gladly, if it were in my power, please all who are connected with me: but if they reduce me to the dilemma of either displeasing them or God, they must excuse me: for "I must obey God rather than man^f." The persons who are offended with me, would expect their servant to obey them rather than a stranger: and is not God entitled to that deference from me? I am "a servant of Jesus Christ;" and I must, at the peril of my soul, obey him. And as our blessed Lord said respecting his own conduct to his heavenly Father, "I do always those things which please him^g;" so, God helping me, will I say: and if I stand condemned for it at man's tribunal, I have this comfort, that, when standing at the tribunal of my God, he will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord^h."]

^d Matt. x. 35, 36.^e Heb. xi. 5.^f Acts v. 29.^g John viii. 29.^h Matt. xxv. 21.

MMLII.

CONVERSION, AND ITS EFFECTS.

Gal. i. 15, 16. *When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.*

GREAT were the trials which the Apostle Paul met with in the Churches of Galatia through the subtilty of some Judaizing teachers, who laboured, and with too much success, to turn the newly converted Christians from the faith which Paul had preached to them, and to bring them over to a faith compounded of Judaism and Christianity. To give the greater weight to their doctrines, they represented Paul as preaching a Gospel which he had received only from human authority, and not from the Lord Jesus Christ, as all the other Apostles had; and consequently, as unworthy of the confidence

which his followers reposed in him. To counteract the sad effects of their representations, St. Paul, in the very introduction to his Epistle to the Galatians, declared, that he had received his Gospel, “not of men (as the authors), nor by man (as an instrument), but directly from the Lord Jesus Christ, and from God the Father, who had raised him from the dead^a :” and then, after expressing his “wonder that they had been so soon turned away from him who had called them into the grace of Christ,” he proceeds to vindicate more fully his apostolic authority: “I certify you, brethren,” says he, “that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man: for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ^b.” Then, after specifying the time when it was revealed to him, namely, in his way to Damascus, he asserts, that he studiously avoided every thing which might be construed into a reception of it from men; for he had not gone at all at that time to Jerusalem, where the other Apostles were, but into Arabia, where there was none but God to teach him.

In the account which he thus gives of himself, he gives us an insight into the work of conversion, and into that line of conduct which all converted persons should pursue. It is for the elucidating of these two things that we have selected the passage which we have just read: from which we shall take occasion to shew,

I. Wherein our *conversion* must resemble Paul’s—

Certainly it is not at all necessary that our conversion should resemble his in the external circumstances; for in respect of them he stands alone, not so much as one of his attendants being, as far as we know, converted with him. Nor even in respect of the suddenness of it, is it at all necessary that we should resemble him: our conversion may be so gradual that we cannot trace it to any particular time; and yet it may be as certain and as evident as

^a ver. 1.

^b ver. 11, 12.

his. But in its essential parts conversion is the same in all. Ours therefore must resemble his,

1. In its origin, the electing love of God—

[God “separated him from his mother’s womb” to the apostolic office, just as he had done the prophet Jeremiah to the prophetic office^c. It was evidently not for his righteousness that he was thus chosen to know Christ for himself, and to preach him to others: for, to the very instant of his conversion, he was a blasphemer, and injurious, and a persecutor. His election can be traced to nothing but the sovereign will of God. And to this must *our* conversion also be traced, if ever we have been converted at all. “We have not chosen Christ, but Christ us:” yea, “we were chosen of God in Christ before the foundation of the world,” and “predestinated to the adoption of children” into his family. In this very epistle St. Paul most studiously marks this. He speaks of the Galatians as having known God: but, fearing, as it were, lest they should suppose that the work had begun on their part, he recalls his word, and says, “after that ye have known God, *or rather are known of God*^d.” Let us bear in mind therefore, that, if we are converted, it is “not because we loved God, but because he loved us^e:” “he loved us with an everlasting love; and therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn us^f.”]

2. In its means, the effectual grace of God—

[God “called him by his grace;” and without the effectual working of his grace the Apostle would never have been called at all. Nor shall we ever attain to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus in any other way. Of ourselves “we can do nothing,” no, “not so much as think a good thought:” it is “God alone who can give us either to will or to do” any thing that is good^g. “If we are brought into a state of grace,” it is “he who hath made us willing in the day of his power.” “We are *his* workmanship *created* in Christ Jesus unto good works^h:” the new creation is his work as much as the old: whatever be the means, or whoever be the instrument “to plant or water, it is he alone that gives the increaseⁱ.” Every child of man must say with the Apostle, “By the grace of God I am what I am^k:” “whoever he be that is born again, he is born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God^l.”]

^c Jer. i. 5.

^d Gal. iv. 9. See also Phil. iii. 12.

^e 1 John iv. 10.

^f Jer. xxxi. 3.

^g Phil. ii. 13.

^h Eph. ii. 10.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iii. 6.

^k 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^l John i. 13.

3. In its manner, by a revelation of Christ to the soul—

[As far as relates to the *external* circumstances, we have before said that no analogy exists: but as it respects the revelation of Christ to the soul, conversion is the same in all. There may be a preparatory work of conviction without this; but no conversion: for in this consists the essence of conversion, if we may so speak. The revelation given in the Scriptures may inform the mind; but it is the revelation made to the soul, that can alone convert and save the soul. The means which converted Saul, produced no such effect on his companions. Many others heard the word preached to them, as well as Lydia: but she received benefit from it which others did not, because “the Lord opened her heart to attend to the things that were spoken.” So, if we are savingly enlightened, it is because God has “opened the eyes of our understanding,” and “given us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of his Son^m,” and “shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christⁿ.” It is then only that we truly “receive Christ” as *our* Saviour^o: then only do we “feed truly on his flesh and blood;” then only do we “believe in him to the saving of the soul.”]

4. In its end, to make him known in the world—

[We are not all called, like St. Paul, “to *preach* Christ among the heathen;” but we are called, like Paul himself, to confess him openly^p, and to become his avowed followers, and to shew forth in our life and conversation the power of his grace. We are all to “shine as lights in a dark world, holding forth the word of life^q.” We are to be his witnesses, even “epistles of Christ known and read of all men.” We are so to make our “light shine before men, that all who see us may approve of his ways, and glorify his name^r.”]

From the effect produced on him by his conversion, we are led to consider,

II. Wherein our conduct must resemble his—

It is probable that his words relate rather to his not seeking any intercourse with those who were at that time the pillars of the Christian Church, than to any workings of his own mind, which he studiously

^m Eph. i. 17, 18.

ⁿ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^o John i. 12.

^p Acts xxii. 14, 15. Matt. x. 32, 33.

^q Phil. ii. 15, 16.

^r Matt. v. 16.

suppressed. Yet the decision of his character on the occasion shews us what we should be and do, when once we have received the converting grace of God. We must enter on the duties assigned us,

1. Without hesitation—

[Many doubts will be suggested by our own corrupt hearts, how far it is necessary or expedient to devote ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ; and our carnal friends will not fail to remonstrate with us on our new views and pursuits. They will tell us of the injury which we shall sustain in our reputation and interests, if we make ourselves singular, and join ourselves to “a sect that is everywhere evil spoken of.” They will beseech us with much affectionate importunity to put away these enthusiastic notions: and, if they have power over us, they will blend menaces with their entreaties. But, from whatever quarter the temptation may come, we must examine its tendency, and, as soon as we see that its effect will be to draw us back to the world, we must say to it, as our blessed Lord under similar circumstances said to Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.” We must listen to nothing, however specious it may be, that would cause us to dissemble with God, or divert us from the path prescribed to us in his word. Our one question must be, What does my Lord and Saviour require of me? and by that must we be determined, though the whole world should endeavour to obstruct our way. We must neither be allured by interest, nor deterred by fear; but must “hate father and mother, and even our own lives also, in comparison of Christ.”]

2. Without delay—

[Thus did Paul: “*immediately*” he betook himself to the work assigned him^s. Thus should we also: we should not say, Let me go home first and take leave of my friends, or bury my father: No: let the dead bury their dead: our duty is to fulfil the will of Him who has called us to his kingdom and glory. We shall occasionally feel strong temptations on this subject. When difficulties and dangers present themselves, we shall be ready to think we shall find some more convenient season, when our way will be more plain and easy. But we must, like Matthew at the receipt of custom, or like others of the Apostles at their nets, forsake all and follow Christ.]

APPLICATION—

1. Let those of you who have experienced converting grace, give God the glory—

^s Acts ix. 19, 20.

[There is a strange backwardness in man to do this. If all be traced to the sovereign grace of God, we bring forward a thousand objections, that so we may divide the glory with him. But this is not so in heaven: nor should it be on earth. In heaven there is no song but that of "Salvation to God and to the Lamb." Let it be so on earth. It is our indispensable duty, our truest interest, our highest happiness, to give glory to the God of heaven. Let us do it cheerfully, and without reserve.]

2. Let those in whose hearts Christ has been revealed, seek to know more and more of him—

[It is but little that any man knows of him. Paul himself, after preaching Christ for twenty years, desired to know more of him, in the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings. Let us also seek to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of him." The more we behold his glory, the more we shall be changed into his image: and the more we comprehend of his unsearchable love, the more shall we be filled with all the fulness of God.]

3. Let all learn how to avoid the snares which Satan lays for their feet—

[We must not parley with temptation, but act with promptitude and decision. There must be in us a firmness that is immovable: yet should that firmness be tempered with suavity. We must not think, that, because our superiors are wrong in their endeavours to keep us back from Christ, we are at liberty to slight their admonitions on other subjects, or even on religion itself, as far as we can without violating the commands of Christ. Whilst we guard against an undue conformity to the world, we must guard also against two common evils, superstition, and unnecessary scrupulosity: scrupulosity makes that to be sin which is no sin; and superstition makes that to be duty which is no duty. Let us get our minds rightly instructed: in matters of indifference, let us be willing to yield; but in matters of vital interest and importance, let us be firm and faithful even unto death.]

MMLIII.

GOD GLORIFIED IN HIS PEOPLE.

Gal. i. 23, 24. *They had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me.*

THE account of men's conversion to God is a very profitable subject of contemplation. It tends to

illustrate the infinite diversity of ways in which God deals with men, and draws them to himself. St. Paul, on various occasions, mentioned the peculiar manner in which he was turned to God, and brought to the obedience of faith^a. He adverts to it in the chapter before us, in order to establish beyond contradiction his divine mission. It is not my intention to enter into the circumstances of his conversion, any further than they are referred to in my text: from whence I shall take occasion to shew,

I. What may be expected of every true convert—

It is here taken for granted that he has embraced the faith of Christ—

[This is to be taken for granted in all cases: for no man can be a Christian till he has truly come to Christ, seeking mercy at God's hands through him, even through his obedience unto death. This is the distinctive difference between the Christian and others. Others may possess all that Paul himself possessed in his unconverted state: all his privileges of birth, all his attainments in knowledge, all his zeal in religion, and all his blameless morality; and yet, after all, be "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." It is his deep contrition as a sinner, his utter renunciation of all self-dependence, either in respect to righteousness or strength, and his simple affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ, that must characterize him as a true believer———]

This faith he will endeavour, to the utmost of his power, to advance—

[If, like Paul, he have been "put into the ministry," he will "preach Christ" to his people; yea, and will "determine to know nothing among them, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified^b"——— If he be a private Christian, he will exert himself in every possible way to promote the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom. Has he wealth? he will gladly assist in educating pious persons for the service of the sanctuary. Has he influence? he will endeavour to establish faithful ministers in places which seem to afford them scope for more extensive usefulness^c——— Many of the primitive Christians gave up all that they possessed, that, in so doing, they might

^a Acts ix. xxii. and xxvi.

^b 1 Cor. ii. 2.

^c If this subject be used on occasion of a *Visitation*, these hints about the exercise and advancement of the ministry should be considerably diversified and enlarged.

help forward the cause of Christ: and though the same *sacrifices* be not required now, the same *disposition* is; and every Christian in the universe should be able to say, “I count not even my life dear unto me, so that I may but finish my course with joy,” and fulfil my duty to my Lord and Saviour.]

The tidings of the Apostle’s conversion were soon spread far and wide; and the conduct of those who heard of it will shew us, in reference to every other convert,

II. What reason there is to glorify God on his behalf—

In many views is the conversion of a sinner a ground of joy and thankfulness:

1. For the benefit accruing to himself—

[He was but lately lying dead in trespasses and sins: now he is quickened to a new and heavenly life. He was “an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, and a stranger to the covenants of promise: he is now a fellow-citizen with the saints and of the household of God.” He was a child of Satan, and an heir of wrath: he is now a child of God, and an heir of heaven. Over such an one the angels in heaven rejoice^d: yea, over such an one God himself rejoices; “killing for him the fatted calf, and making merry with him^e.” To this change of *state* must be added his change of *nature* also: and who can contemplate that, and not adopt the language of St. Paul, “We give thanks to God, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, and for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven^f?” It matters not who he be, or in what quarter of the globe he live; the tidings of this change should draw forth from us the grateful sentiment which was expressed at the conversion of Cornelius; we should “glorify God, saying, Then hath God to the Gentiles also granted repentance unto life^g.”]

2. For the honour arising to God—

[By none except real converts is God honoured in the world: but by them he is admired, and loved, and served, and glorified. In them, too, do all his glorious perfections shine forth. Who can see a true convert, and not admire the forbearance, the mercy, the love, the power, that have been exercised towards him. In the works of creation the wisdom and goodness of God are visible: but in the new creation, there is a combination of all those perfections, which had no

^d Luke xv. 10.

^f Col. i. 3, 4.

^e Luke xv. 32. with Zeph. iii. 17.

^g Acts xi. 18.

scope for exercise till man had fallen, and was redeemed by the blood of God's only-begotten Son. Can we wonder that the angels, on the first discovery of this work of mercy, burst forth into songs which they had never known before: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men^h!" In truth, this is the one great theme of praise and adoration in heaven: and all who see the subject realized on earth, must, if they have any love to God, rejoice that persons are raised up, to give him the glory due unto his name.]

3. For the advantages that may be expected from it to the Church of God—

[The conversion of St. Paul, what a benefit was it to the whole world! What a benefit will it be to millions through all eternity! And, though none of us can bear any comparison with him, will any one pretend to estimate the good which the very least amongst us may be the means of effecting in the world? The work of a minister does not cease with his personal ministrations; but is ramified through a whole country, and augmented through all succeeding ages. And the poorest person, by a word spoken, or by his life and conversation, may, like Naaman's maid, be the means of converting one, whose influence may extend through a whole kingdom. Every addition therefore to the Church of God, is a ground of joy, and should call forth the devoutest thanksgivings from all to whom the tidings of it are made known.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have never yet embraced the Gospel—

[Never has any one yet had occasion to glorify God for you. On the contrary, there has been reason to weep over you incessantly, even to the present hour — — You may not have been a persecutor of the Church; but you have been an enemy of God and his Christ from your youth up: for "the carnal mind is enmity with God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." You, therefore, must be converted as much as he. It is not needful that you should be converted *in the same way* as he, or *in the same sudden manner*; but converted you must be, or perishⁱ. You must believe as he did; and embrace that very Gospel which he preached. O, beg of "God to count you worthy of this calling, and to fulfil in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, and *the work of faith* with power; that *the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you*, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ^k."]

^h Luke ii. 14.

ⁱ Matt. xviii. 3.

^k 2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

2. Those who profess themselves to have received the Gospel—

[See that ye “*adorn* the Gospel; that ye adorn it in *all things*.” Let the change be as visible in you, as it was in Paul. I mean not that ye are to affect the same ostensible character as he sustained; for ye are not called to *that*: but to live unto God ye are called; and to exert yourselves, according to your opportunities and ability, to promote his glory in the world, ye are called: and therefore to all of you, without exception, I say, “Let your light so shine before men, that they, beholding your good works, *may glorify your Father* which is in heaven¹.”]

¹ Matt. v. 16.

MMLIV.

CHRISTIAN AND UNCHRISTIAN PERTINACITY.

Gal. ii. 5. *To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the Gospel might continue with you.*

NEVER, from the foundation of the world, was there, as far as we know, a richer combination of graces in any child of man, than in the Apostle Paul. As in light there is an assemblage of very different rays, which, when in due proportion and in simultaneous motion, cause that bright and pure effulgence which we call light, so in him were found dispositions most opposed to each other, yet so combined as to form in him the most perfect character. Certainly, that which first of all strikes us as constituting the chief trait in his character, is a freedom from all selfish feelings, and a willingness to do or suffer any thing whereby man may be benefited, and God be glorified. Yet, in the passage which we have just read, we see, not only an inflexibility of mind, but such an expression of it as we should scarcely have expected from so mild and kind a man.

When he was at Jerusalem, attended by a young disciple, named Titus, he was urged to have him circumcised; not for the purpose of removing prejudice, and gaining an easier access to the minds of men,

but from an idea, that the observance of that rite was necessary to the completion of Christianity, and to the attainment of the Gospel salvation. To such advisers he would not listen for a moment. Whatever might be their rank or influence in the Church, he regarded them not as deserving the slightest deference from him on such a subject^a; since a compliance with their wishes would vitiate, and altogether invalidate, the Gospel of Christ.

Now, that this inflexibility of his may be duly appreciated, I will shew,

I. When pertinacity may be considered as unamiable and sinful—

“To be zealously affected always *in a good thing* is commendable^b :” but zeal may be misplaced, and especially when it operates so far as to make a man inflexible. A bold, confident, dogmatical spirit, is at all times unamiable; and especially,

1. When the object in dispute is questionable or indifferent—

[Some there are, who, on every subject, speak as if they were infallible; and not only claim, what must be conceded to them, a right to think and act for themselves, but a right to impose on others also a necessity to comply with their mind and will. At all events, they themselves are immovable on almost any subject upon which they have formed even the most hasty opinion: and, if they tolerate, they will never adopt, the sentiments opposed to them. Such were the dispositions manifested by many in the Apostle’s days, especially in reference to some ordinances of the Jewish law; such as the observance of certain days, and the eating of meats offered to idols. So confident were the opposite parties, that, not content with following their own judgment, they each condemned the practice of the other; “the strong despising the weak, and the weak sitting in judgment on the strong^c.” But how did the Apostle Paul act? He knew that neither the observance nor the neglect of such forms could “commend a man to God, or ameliorate his state before God^d,” consequently, that he was at liberty to act in relation to them as circumstances might require: but, “rather than use his

^a See ver. 6.

^b Gal. iv. 18.

^c Rom. xiv. 1—3.

^d 1 Cor. viii. 8.

liberty in a way that should give offence to a weak brother, he would not eat flesh so long as the world should stand^e."

View him on another occasion, towards the close of his life. Being at Jerusalem, where there were "many thousands of Jews zealous of the law, he was advised by James, and all the elders of the Church, to join with four other persons in performing the vows of Nazariteship, according to the law of Moses; in order to shew, that, notwithstanding he had maintained the liberty of the Gentiles to disregard the Mosaic ritual, he was no enemy to it, so far as respected the Jews, who could not yet see that it was abolished. Had he been of a self-willed and a pertinacious mind, he might have urged reasons in plenty, which, in appearance at least, might justify his opposition to this advice. But he had no wish, no will, no way of his own, if, by renouncing it, he might do good, and benefit his fellow-creatures; and therefore "the very next day he commenced the work of purification in the temple, according to the law of Moses^f." (There are, indeed, those who condemn him for this act of conformity. But, as they set up their own judgment against St. James, and all the saints and elders of Jerusalem, I leave them without further remark.)

Now we see, in these instances, how condescending he was to the views and wishes of others; and what that spirit was which he exercised, as contrasted with the unamiable and unchristian spirit of his opponents.]

2. When the object in dispute is purely temporal and carnal—

[Some will contend about the veriest trifles, wherein their own interest is concerned: and will even glory in their firmness and pertinacity. But this spirit is in direct opposition to the mind of Christ, who says, "If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also: and whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain^g." Let us see how St. Paul acted in reference to such matters. He had a right to be supported by the Church to which he ministered. God's law had actually so appointed, that "they should not muzzle the ox that trod out the corn." But there were, in the Church, some teachers whose main object was to advance their own interests, and who would not fail to cite him as sanctioning, by his example, their selfish habits. He therefore determined to wave altogether his own rights; and to work night and day for his own support, rather than to afford them such a sanction as they desired^h. We

^e 1 Cor. viii. 13. ^f Acts xxi. 20—26. ^g Matt. v. 40, 41.

^h 1 Cor. ix. 4—15. 2 Cor. xi. 9, 12. 1 Thess. ii. 9. 2 Thess. iii. 8, 9.

have a lovely instance of disinterestedness in Mephibosheth, the son of Saul. When David fled from the face of Absalom, Ziba, Mephibosheth's servant, took his master's asses laden with provisions, and went with them to David; reporting that his master was now gratified with the hope of David's death, and of his own restoration to his father's throne. David, in consequence of this, gave to Ziba all his master's property. But on David's return to Jerusalem, Mephibosheth went to meet him; and told him how deeply he had sympathized with the banished monarch, and how scandalously he had been traduced by his servant Ziba. Upon this, David so far recalled his former grant to Ziba, as to order that Mephibosheth and Ziba should divide the property between them. Upon which, Mephibosheth, forgetting all the injuries he had sustained from Ziba, replied, "Let *him* take *all*, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own houseⁱ." Here we see how all his own personal interests were swallowed up in a sense of love to David, and in a joyful participation of David's happiness.

Such is the duty of every true Christian. For St. Paul, speaking to those Corinthians who contended for their own rights, and carried their contests into a court of law, tells them that "there was utterly a fault among them;" and then says, "Why do ye not rather take wrong, and suffer yourselves to be defrauded^k?" As for carrying this yielding spirit to excess, we are in no danger of *that*: our danger is, the not carrying it far enough: for it is impossible not to see, that, in the whole of our Saviour's life, he never shined more bright than "when, being led as a lamb to the slaughter, he opened not his mouth^l;" and when he was treated with every species of cruelty upon the cross, he prayed and apologized for his murderers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do^m."]

But, notwithstanding the hatefulness of pertinacity in general, there are seasons,

II. When it becomes a virtue of prime necessity—

A firmness of character is indispensable in the true Christian: and he must be absolutely "immoveableⁿ,"

1. When otherwise the obedience of Christ would be violated—

[Not our actions only, but "our very thoughts also, are to be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ^o."

ⁱ 2 Sam. xix. 30.

^m Luke xxiii. 34.

^k 1 Cor. vi. 7.

ⁿ 1 Cor. xv. 58.

^l Isai. liii. 7.

^o 2 Cor. x. 5.

A command from him supersedes all human authority, and must be obeyed under all circumstances. The Hebrew Youths were required to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image: they were the only persons in the whole Chaldean empire who refused to comply with the royal edict: and they were threatened to be cast into a furnace of fire, if they persisted in their disobedience^p: yet did they maintain their steadfastness, in despite of all these menaces: and in this they acted as became the servants of the living God. Daniel manifested the same holy boldness, when he was commanded not to offer prayers to Jehovah for the space of thirty days. He had been accustomed to pray with his window open towards the holy city of Jerusalem: and he might have avoided observation, if he would only have shut his window. But he felt himself bound to honour God at all events, and not to dissemble before him. He therefore yielded not to intimidation; but submitted rather to be cast into the den of lions, than to violate his duty to his God^q. Who does not admire the fortitude of these men, and commend their pertinacity in such a cause? The Apostles of our Lord all maintained the same firmness, when forbidden to preach in the name of Christ. Their governors would probably have connived at their secret adherence to Christ, if only they would forbear to preach his name, and to diffuse their heresy around them. But these holy men had received a commission to preach the Gospel; and execute it they would, whatever perils they might incur in the discharge of their duty. And they appealed to their governors themselves, whether it was right or possible for them to act otherwise: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard^r." Thus we, in our respective situations, may be called upon, by those who are in authority over us, to neglect or violate a positive duty: but we must not give place by subjection, no, not for an hour; but "must obey God rather than man^s;" and must "resist unto blood, striving against sin^t;" and glory in death itself, when sustained in such a cause^u.]

2. When otherwise the faith of Christ would be compromised—

[This was the particular point at issue between St. Paul and the Judaizing teachers whom he opposed. He had formerly circumcised Timothy, because he judged that that measure would facilitate his access to his Jewish brethren, and his acceptance with them. But the circumcision of Titus was

^p Dan. iii. 16—18.

^q Dan. vi. 10, 11.

^r Acts iv. 18—20.

^s Acts v. 29.

^t Heb. xii. 4.

^u Acts xx. 24.

demanded, as necessary to complete and perfect the Gospel-salvation. To accede to it in that view would have been to betray his trust, as the minister of the Gentiles. He knew that the Mosaic law was abrogated: and, so far would the observance of it be from perfecting the work of Christ, that it would invalidate it altogether^x, and cause Christ himself to have died in vain^y. Could he then yield to such a demand as this? No, not for an hour; not for a moment. On the contrary, if Peter himself were led to dissemble, and to compromise in any respect the faith of Christ, Paul would “rebuke him to his face,” and *that* too before the whole Church^z: so determined was he to preserve from every base mixture the faith which he had been commissioned to propagate and uphold. Now, this jealousy must we also cherish, in reference to the faith of Christ. We must suffer nothing for a moment to blend itself with the work of Christ, as a ground of our hope before God. The doctrine of human merit must be an utter abomination in our eyes; as robbing Christ of his glory, and as substituting a foundation of sand in the place of the Rock of Ages. There is but one foundation: there can be no other^a: and if any power on earth could require us to build on any other, or to put so much as a single stone to it of our own forming, we must not listen to him for a moment. The altar was to be built of whole stones, not hewn or wrought by man^b; and Christ alone must sanctify our offerings, and procure us acceptance with our God. And so firm must we be in our adherence to him, and so simple in our affiance, that if an angel from heaven were to instill into our minds any doctrine that would interfere with this, we must not hesitate to denounce him as accursed^c: so “earnestly must we contend for the faith^d,” and so resolutely must we keep it pure and undefiled.]

SEE, then,

1. What need we have to get our minds duly enlightened—

[Suppose, for a moment, St. Paul had proved as ignorant or unstable as St. Peter, what evils would have accrued, both to the Church and to the world at large! In fact, the whole faith of Christ would have been subverted; and, if God had not in some other way interposed to prevent it, the whole world would have been ruined. Yet how little is this point considered, by many who nevertheless call themselves Christians! The whole Church of Rome has set aside the faith of Christ,

^x Gal. v. 2.

^a Acts iv. 12. 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^c Gal. i. 6—8.

^y Gal. v. 4.

^z ver. 11.

^b Exod. xx. 25. Deut. xxvii. 5, 6

^d Jude, ver. 3.

by uniting with Christ other objects of faith and other grounds of hope. It is right, therefore, that every enlightened man should protest against it, and depart from it. But shall we, therefore, justify those who depart from our Church? No; for the faith of Christ, as maintained by our Church, is pure and unadulterated: and we have shewn, that, in matters of minor and subordinate importance, to indulge an unreasonable stiffness and pertinacity is not well: and we ought to have our judgment well informed, so as to discriminate clearly between the foundation and the superstructure. In the superstructure there may be somewhat undesirable, and yet no material injury accrue: but an error in the foundation will be fatal to the whole building: and this is the consideration which alone justifies a determined and uncompromising resistance to the established order of our Church. St. Paul has drawn this line of distinction, and adopted it as the rule of his own conduct; as indeed did James also, and all the other Apostles: and the more we get our views and habits assimilated to theirs, the better members we shall be of the Church of Christ.]

2. What need we have to get our spirit and conduct duly regulated—

[That same pertinacity which, under some circumstances, is necessary, under others is unbecoming the true Christian. A yielding spirit is lovely: and perhaps we may say, that a *yielding temper* should be *the rule*, and a *pertinacious spirit* *the exception*. Perhaps too we may say, that men will do well to mark the natural bias of their minds, and in their conduct to lean rather to that side which is opposed to it. A person of a very gentle and yielding spirit should rather lean to the side of firmness in doubtful matters; and a person of a naturally bold and determined spirit should rather cultivate a spirit of compliance: because we are not in danger of erring *much* in opposition to our natural inclination; and if we do go too far, we have always something within our own bosoms to bring us back: whereas, if we err on the side of our natural bias, we may be precipitated we know not whither, and have nothing to bring us back again to a due equipoise. But, under any circumstances, we must take care not to plead conscience, where, in fact, it is our own will that guides us; and, on the other hand, not to plead Christian liberty, where the path of duty is that of self-denying firmness. But “who is sufficient for these things?” If such men as Peter and Barnabas erred, we had need to cry mightily to God to “direct our feet in the right way,” and to “uphold us in our goings, that our footsteps slip not.”]

MMLV.

REMEMBERING THE POOR.

Gal. ii. 10. *Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.*

THE circumstances to which my text refers, were very peculiar. St. Paul, in conformity with the commission given him by the Lord, had preached his Gospel to the Gentiles, whilst the other Apostles confined chiefly their ministrations to the Jews: and, knowing that the ceremonial law had never been given to the Gentiles, he neither required of them the observance of it, nor observed it himself. But now, after fourteen years, he went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas his fellow-labourer; and, being aware that his having neglected and dispensed with the ceremonial law was likely to excite prejudice against him amongst the Jews, he sought a private interview with the chief Apostles first, in order that he might explain to them the reasons of his conduct, and through them remove all objections from the minds of others. Having succeeded in this, he desired to know whether they, with all their superior advantages, could give him any additional instruction: but they frankly acknowledged, that they could add nothing to him; and all that they had to request of him was, that “he would remember the poor; which he of himself was most forward to do.”

Now, from hence I will take occasion to shew you,

I. In what respects difformity is admissible—

The difference between St. Paul’s ministrations, and those of the other Apostles, was exceeding great—

[St. Paul, as we have said, dispensed with the Jewish laws altogether; whilst the other Apostles observed them. Now this difference, if Paul had not acted with consummate prudence, would have made an irreconcilable breach between them. Nor do we blame the other Apostles for the jealousy they exercised on this occasion. They had received the law from God; and were told, in that very law, that “every one who should presumptuously neglect it in any respect, should

be cut off from the people of the Lord^a." They did not, as yet, clearly see that the law had been abrogated by the Lord: much less was this known to the Jews in general at Jerusalem. Still, however, it was so far understood, that all acknowledged, that the difference between Paul and them was, under existing circumstances, admissible. They saw, as Paul himself also did, that an uniform practice *at Jerusalem* was expedient: and therefore St. Paul himself, whilst at Jerusalem, observed the law, as well as others: yea, many years after this, he even joined himself to others who had made a vow to purify themselves as Nazarites, and purified himself together with them^b. But, amongst the Gentiles, such observances were regarded as altogether indifferent; and therefore were neither required by him from others, nor retained in his own practice.]

Now this is the precise path adopted by the Church of England—

[The Church of England has its rites, its forms, its ceremonies; but they are as few, and as simple, as can be imagined. Nor does she require them to be observed by any but her own members. Others, who judge them inexpedient, are left to adopt any other rites which in their minds and consciences they prefer. And in this the Church of England differs altogether from the Church of Rome, which insists on an universal observance of all her forms; and denounces, as heretics, and consigns over to perdition, all who differ from her. Every society under heaven has rules established for its own government, and expects its members to conform to them; else there would be nothing, in any society, but disorder and confusion. And the Church of England fitly requires this: and I hesitate not to say, that her members generally, and her ministers in particular, are bound in conscience to adhere to them. But, where a diversity of circumstances calls for a diversity of habits, there the rules, by which we were previously bound, are relaxed; and a difference of conduct may readily be admitted^c.

The true medium for our adoption is this; to think for ourselves; but *neither to be intolerant nor rigid*. The whole college of Apostles at Jerusalem observed the law themselves, but tolerated the non-observance of it in others. St. Paul, on the other hand, knowing that the law was no longer obligatory on him, observed it, because he would not give needless offence by refusing to conform to the established

^a Numb. xv. 30.

^b Acts xxi. 23, 24.

^c Presbyterianism is the Established Church in Scotland; and the king, George IV. as became a wise, and candid, and tolerant monarch, attended divine worship at the Kirk.

usages. This was a becoming spirit in both: and if this spirit prevailed amongst us, as it ought, we should see very little of separation from the Established Church, and no want of cordiality towards those who judged themselves constrained to differ from her^d.]

Thus we see how far they were agreed to differ. Now let us see,

II. In what respects uniformity is indispensable—

In doctrine they were all agreed. All preached repentance, and remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ. And in this can no difference be admitted; seeing there is no “other foundation whereon any man can build, but Jesus Christ^e ;” “nor any other name given, whereby any man can be saved^f.” Hence, when Peter countenanced an idea that an observance of the law was necessary, and thereby obscured and endangered the purity of the Gospel, St. Paul reproved him to his face before the whole Church^g. So far from tolerating any thing that should supersede the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, St. Paul denounced a curse even against an angel from heaven, if one should be found to publish any doctrine that would interfere with this. Uniformity in this respect, therefore, was *taken for granted*. But we have in our text one point insisted on by those at Jerusalem, and cordially acceded to on the part of Paul; namely, the universal necessity of exercising love, and especially to the destitute and distressed. This was the ONLY point which they specified, as indispensably necessary to the Christian character: on which, therefore, they required that no difference whatever should exist. Of this, then, I must say,

1. It is, by the unanimous judgment of all the Apostles, recommended to you—

[It is absolutely essential to piety, that it exert itself in a way of tender sympathy and self-denying energy towards all the members of Christ's mystical body. If we exercise not ourselves in this way, we in vain profess to have love either

^d See the 34th Article.

^e 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^f Acts iv. 12.

^g ver. 11.

towards God or man. We have none towards God: for St. John says, "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, *how dwelleth the love of God in him^h?*" Nor can we have any real love towards our fellow-creature: for St. James saith, "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding, ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profitⁱ?" Nor, in fact, can we have any true religion at all: for St. James again saith: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction^k." Indeed, I must add yet further, that we can have no hope before God in the day of judgment: for our Lord will say to those who have neglected these offices of love, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to the least of these my brethren, ye did it not to me: and therefore depart accursed into everlasting fire^l." I do then most solemnly recommend to you, my brethren, that you very especially attend to this duty at all times, and under all circumstances. And, when I strike this chord, saying, "Remember the poor," I do hope that in your hearts there will be found a corresponding string, that shall vibrate at the touch; and that every one of you will reply, 'This is the very thing which I myself am forward to do.']

2. It is that which the present occasion more particularly calls for—^m

TO CONCLUDE—Unite in your own hearts the blessed dispositions which are here exhibited. Cultivate,

1. A spirit of candour towards those who differ from you—

[There is in many a narrowness of mind, like that of the Apostles, when "they forbad a man to cast out devils, because he followed not with them." It cannot be expected that all should think alike on matters of minor importance: nor should you be grieved with any because they move not exactly in your way. There is no need that you should adopt the forms of those who differ from you: you must all judge and act for yourselves: but you should concede to others the liberty which you claim; and "bid God speed to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."]

^h 1 John iii. 17.

ⁱ Jam. ii. 15, 16.

^k Jam. i. 27.

^l Matt. xxv. 40, 41.

^m Here state the particulars of the Charity for which you plead; and urge on the audience either its necessities or its use.

2. A spirit of benevolence towards those who need your aid—

[If you are richer than others, consider yourselves as the Lord's stewards; and do not stay till you are called upon, and then "give your alms grudgingly and of necessity;" but "be glad to distribute, and willing to communicate;" remembering that blessed saying of our Lord, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."]

MMLVI.

PETER REPROVED BY PAUL.

Gal. ii. 14—16. *When I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

THE Apostles, in all that they *declared*, were infallible, being under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, by whom they were inspired; but, in what they *did*, they were frail and fallible, like other men. Of this we have a painful evidence in the passage before us; wherein we see Peter, from whom the Roman pontiff, unfortunately for his own claims, derives his infallibility, fallen into the grossest error, and acting in a way which brought upon him the severest reprehension. The circumstances relating to that event are faithfully recorded for the instruction of the Church in all ages: and, as they comprehend things of fundamental importance to our welfare, we will enter into them somewhat minutely; and state,

I. The conduct reproved—

Peter, during his stay at Antioch, where the Church consisted almost exclusively of converts from among

the Gentiles, had disregarded the distinctions of the Jewish law, which he knew to be no longer binding; and had acted according to the customs of the Gentiles amongst whom he dwelt: but upon the arrival of certain persons from Jerusalem, where the ordinances of the Mosaic law were still continued in the Church, he returned to the observation of the Jewish ritual, and constrained the Gentiles also to follow his example. Now this was highly reprehensible, being,

1. Most sinful in itself—

[Had he from a tender regard to the prejudices of his less enlightened brethren conformed to their customs, he would have done well; even as Paul himself did, when, “to the Jews, he became a Jew, and to those who were under the law, as under the law.” But, whilst he did this, he should have taken care to maintain the liberty of the Gentile converts, and to explain to them his reasons for reverting to Jewish ceremonies, that they might not be ensnared by his example. But instead of acting with this caution and tenderness towards the Gentile converts, he withdrew from them, and compelled them to conform to *Jewish* rites: and this he did too, not *from love* to the Jews, but *from fear* of their displeasure. Now this was gross “dissimulation:” He *knew*, that the Jewish law was abrogated: he *knew*, that he himself was liberated from the observance of it: he *knew*, that the Gentiles could have no concern with it; and that to enjoin the observance of it on them, was to impose a yoke on them, which neither he himself nor any of his ancestors had been able to sustain. In this therefore he walked not uprightly; but betrayed the trust which had been committed to him, the apostolic trust, of enlightening and saving a ruined world.]

2. Most pernicious in its tendency—

[This conduct of his tended to sanction the most fatal error, and, in fact, to subvert the whole Gospel. The Jewish converts had an idea, that the Gospel itself could not save them, unless they added to it the observance of the law: and it was found impossible at once to eradicate this prejudice from the Jewish mind, because they could not see how that, which God had so strictly enjoined under one dispensation, could be wholly set aside under another. Indeed this was the great stumbling-block to the Jews: and if they could have been allowed to blend their law with the Gospel, they would almost universally, and with great readiness, have embraced the Gospel. But of such a mixture the Gospel does not admit. Christ has in his own person fulfilled the law; and, by his

obedience unto death, salvation is provided for a ruined world. No other obedience must be blended with it as a joint ground of hope: his righteousness is that which alone can justify us before God; and his must be all the glory. But Peter by this conduct confirmed the Jews in their error, and established the same error among the Gentiles also: and, if God had not raised up Paul to reprove it in the outset, the whole Gospel might have been superseded, almost as soon as it had been promulgated: and all the effects of Christ's mediation might have been utterly destroyed. We see on that occasion how far the influence of Peter extended: for it drew away all the Jewish converts at Antioch, yes, and even Barnabas himself, from the truth of God: and if the evil had not been stopped in its commencement, who can tell how soon, and how fatally, it might have inundated the whole Church? Verily such conduct as this deserved reproof; and we have reason to bless our God, who endued Paul with wisdom and courage to reprove it.]

Suitable to the occasion was,

II. The reproof administered—

St. Paul, when he saw the misconduct of Peter, did not secretly endeavour to destroy the character of his offending brother, but boldly and openly reproved him before the whole Church. Had the offence been of a private and personal nature only, it would have been right to admonish his brother privately, and not to bring it before the Church, till private admonitions had been used in vain: but, when the welfare of the whole Church was at stake, it was necessary that the reproof should be as public as the offence. Hence, when all the Church was assembled, Paul took occasion to reprove,

1. His inconsistency—

[Peter had in that very place neglected the Jewish law, as he was fully authorized to do: but, when some Jews came thither from Jerusalem, he both altered his own conduct, and compelled all others, even Gentiles themselves, to follow his example. What a grievous inconsistency was this! And how must he have been struck dumb, when Paul so pointedly expostulated with him, “If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, WHY compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?” What excuse could he offer? Alas! none all.

But grievous as such inconsistency would have been in any one, it was peculiarly sinful in Peter: for it was at this very place, Antioch, that the point had been some time before discussed with great vehemence; and so pertinaciously had the Jewish teachers maintained the universal and perpetual obligation of their own law, that not even the united wisdom and authority of Paul and Barnabas could settle the dispute; so that it became necessary to refer the matter to the decision of the whole college of Apostles at Jerusalem. Accordingly the question was stated; and Paul and Barnabas on the one side, and some of the Judaizing teachers on the other, were deputed to go up to Jerusalem, and there to get it finally settled by such authority as they were all agreed to submit to. Accordingly the deputation went; and laid before the Apostles the matter in dispute. And who, of all the Apostles, was the man that undertook to determine it? It was this very Peter, who now was undoing all that he had before done. He called the attention of the assembly to the commission which he had received to open the kingdom of heaven both to Jews and Gentiles; and reminded them, that, on his preaching first to the Gentiles, God had sent down the Holy Spirit on them, precisely as he had before done upon the Jews at the day of Pentecost; thus visibly and unquestionably declaring, that the Gentiles were to have the Gospel freely administered to them without any observance of the Jewish law. And on this testimony, supported by that of the prophetic writings, James, who presided on that occasion, determined the point; and, to the great joy of the Gentile converts, confirmed to them the liberty which they were so desirous to retain^a. Yet behold, this very Peter, at this very place, before these very Gentiles, and in the presence of these very messengers, Paul and Barnabas, took upon himself to rescind the decree of the whole college of Apostles, and to insist on the Gentiles observing Jewish rites, which he, as a Jew, had neglected and despised. Alas! Peter, who would have expected this at thy hands? Who would have thought that, after having been distinguished above all the children of men, in that the keys of the kingdom of heaven were committed unto thee from thy Saviour's hands; and after having seen myriads flock into it in consequence of thine opening of the doors, thou shouldest use those very keys to shut the doors again, and thereby, as far as in thee lay, exclude from the kingdom all who had already entered, and all others of the human race? Verily, the reproof given thee, though so public and severe, was nothing more than what thou justly deservedst for thy grievous inconsistency.]

2. His impiety—

^a Acts xv. 1—19. with Matt. xvi. 18, 19. and Acts x. 34—44.

[It was not the decree of man, but of the Most High God, that he presumed to abrogate. God had graciously sent his only-begotten Son to be the Saviour of the world: and had declared that in him should all nations be blessed. By faith in that Saviour had Abraham, the father of the faithful, been saved, hundreds of years before the Mosaic law was given: and when that law was given, it was not intended to alter the nature of the salvation before promised, but only to keep the Jews a separate people, and to prepare them for the Saviour whom they were taught to expect. Thus not even to the Jews was the observance of the Mosaic ritual enjoined for the purpose of establishing a righteousness by means of it, but only to direct their attention to that Saviour, from whom alone a saving righteousness could be obtained. Yet behold, Peter undertook to change the very way of salvation itself, and to thrust from his office that adorable Saviour, who had already come down from heaven, and “purchased the Church with his own blood.” Had an angel from heaven been guilty of such presumption, he had, as St. Paul tells us, deserved to be accursed^b: What then didst not thou deserve for thine impiety, unhappy Peter, when, in committing it, thou knewest that thou wast sinning against God, and subverting the very foundations of a Christian’s hope! Methinks, if Satan exulted when he had prevailed on thee to deny thy Lord and Saviour, how much more did he shout for joy when he had seduced thee so to betray the trust reposed in thee, as to give him a hope, that through thee the Saviour’s kingdom should be utterly and eternally destroyed! Holy Paul, we thank thee for thy fidelity to thy fallen brother: we thank thee for thy zeal in thy Master’s cause, and for thy love to the whole Gentile world. But above all, we adore thee, O most blessed God, who didst endue thy servant with such wisdom and grace, and enable him by his timely and courageous interposition to break the snare which Satan had laid for the whole race of mankind.]

The fact thus recorded is of infinite importance on account of,

III. The instruction to be gathered from it—

Every part of this record teems with instruction. But we must content ourselves with submitting to your attention two points only; namely,

1. That salvation is solely by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, without the works of the law—

[This forms the very ground of the reproof which Paul

^b Gal. i. 8, 9.

gave to Peter. It was indeed the observance of the *ceremonial* law that gave occasion for the reproof: but the works of the *moral* law must of necessity be comprehended in the reproof itself, because it is as a subversion of the faith of Christ that St. Paul chiefly complains of Peter's conduct. The observance of the ceremonial law, as an act of obedience to God, might have been unnecessary, and inexpedient: but it could not have been of so fatal a nature as St. Paul represents it, if obedience in other respects had been meritorious before God: if it did not *add to* the merit of moral obedience, it could not so *detract from* it, as to make both that and the death of Christ also of no value: yet St. Paul speaks of it as "removing the people from the grace of Christ to another Gospel^c," yea, "as frustrating the grace of God," and causing "the death of Christ to be in vain^d." It was in this view, I say, as tending to establish a salvation by works instead of a salvation by faith in Christ, that St. Paul so strenuously opposed the conduct of Peter. The Apostles "*knew* that a man could not be justified by the works of the law;" and therefore they renounced all dependence on the works of the law, and looked for justification solely by faith in Christ. This, I say, they did themselves, and this they inculcated on others, as indispensably necessary to their salvation. St. Paul elsewhere tells us, that in this way Abraham was saved^e; and David was saved^f; and all the world must be saved^g. But in no part of Scripture is this truth more forcibly declared than in the passage before us. We may contrive to pervert *words*, however plain they be: but here are *facts*, which we cannot get over; and which speak volumes. Let us learn then not to subject ourselves to similar reproof, by blending any human works with the merits of Christ, or using our influence towards the establishment of so fatal an error. Let us be thankful to God that we have had reformers, who have ventured to withstand the impositions of popery, and have, at the expense of their own lives, emancipated us from the thralldom in which he who calls himself the successor of Peter, and boasts of deriving infallibility from him, had so long held the whole Christian world. And, if there arise amongst ourselves any who would yet stand forth as advocates of human merit, let us refer them to the Articles and Homilies of our own Church; that, if they believe not the language of inspiration, they may at least be put to shame before that Church, which has received those documents as the acknowledged symbols of her faith^h.]

^c Gal. i. 6. ^d ver. 21. ^e Rom. iv. 1—5. ^f Rom. iv. 6—8.

^g Rom. iv. 9—14. See also Rom. ix. 30—33. and x. 3, 4.

^h See the 10th, 11th, and 12th Articles of the Church of England: and take for a pattern the Apostle Paul. ver. 5.

2. That no consideration under heaven should lead us to compromise the truth of God—

[Peter doubtless excused himself in his own mind from an idea that his dissimulation was, in existing circumstances, *expedient*. But expediency, though worthy to be attended to by every true Christian, and in many instances a proper rule for his conduct, has no place, except in things that are otherwise indifferent. It can never warrant us to neglect a known duty, or to commit the smallest sin: for, if it could, Daniel and the Hebrew Youths might have avoided the snares that were laid for their feet. Nothing can warrant dissimulation. What we believe to be true, we must uphold and vindicate: and what we believe to be right we must do. Neither a desire to please, nor a fear of displeasing, must cause us to swerve an hair's breadth from the path of duty. We must obey the dictates of our own conscience, and "be faithful unto death, if ever we would receive a crown of life." We cannot indeed expect that we shall never err, seeing that infallibility pertains not to our fallen nature, nor is the lot of any of the sons of men: but if we err, it must not be through fear or through favour, but simply through the weakness incident to man in his present fallen state; and we must be especially careful that the error be not in any thing of fundamental importance. We may in our superstructure "build hay, or wood, or stubble," and yet ourselves be ultimately "saved, though it be so as by fire:" but, if we err in the foundation, we involve ourselves in inevitable and everlasting ruinⁱ. Let us look to it therefore that we "hold fast the faith once delivered to the saints." Let nothing be suffered for one moment to move us from it. Let us bear in mind, that "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." On that let us build, even on that alone, not uniting any thing with it, or attempting to strengthen it by any addition of our own. Let us guard against any approximation to this fatal error. Many there are, who, whilst they would abhor the thought of uniting their own merits with the merits of Christ, will yet, through a false notion of humility, not venture to trust in Christ, unless they can see some measure of worthiness in themselves. But this is in reality, whatever it may be thought, a repetition of Peter's sin; and will sooner or later meet with a severe reprehension from our God. We must go to Christ guilty, that we may be forgiven; naked, that we may be clothed; polluted, that we may be sanctified: and, when we are most empty in ourselves, then shall we receive most out of his fulness. We must "know nothing but Christ and him crucified," and be contented to be nothing, that he may be "all in all."]

ⁱ 1 Cor. iii. 10—15.

MMLVII.

TRUE USE OF THE LAW.

Gal. ii. 19. *I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.*

THE knowledge of the law is indispensably necessary to the knowledge of the Gospel. Even persons who have some views of Christ as a Saviour, have, in general, a very inadequate idea of the extent to which we need a Saviour. This can be known only by considering the requirements of the law, and the measure of guilt which we have contracted by our violation of them. In unfolding to us this subject, the Epistle to the Galatians stands, perhaps, pre-eminent above all others, not excepting even that to the Romans; and the words which I have just read will furnish me with an occasion to submit it somewhat fully to your view.

In these words is declared the use of the law,

I. In relation to our hopes from it—

The law, in the first instance, was ordained unto life; and it would have given life to those who perfectly obeyed it. But to fallen man it is no longer a covenant of life: it rather destroys all our hopes of acceptance by our obedience to it; so that every one who understands it aright must say with the Apostle, “I through the law am dead to the law.” It produces this effect,

1. By the extent of its precepts—

[If these comprehended nothing beyond the letter, the generality, of Christians at least, might account themselves, “as touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” But it extends to every thought and disposition of the soul. It forbids us to entertain even so much as an inordinate desire. It does not say merely, “Thou shalt not steal,” but, “Thou shalt not covet.” And our blessed Lord, in his sermon on the mount, declares, that an angry feeling is, in God’s estimation, as murder, and an impure look as adultery. Now then, when “the commandment is so exceeding broad,” who

will pretend to have kept it? or who will build his hopes of salvation on his obedience to it? It is manifest, that there is not a man upon earth who has not, in numberless instances, violated it; and who therefore must not shut his mouth with conscious shame, and acknowledge himself “guilty before God^a.”]

2. By the inexorableness of its threatenings—

[For every violation of its commands it denounces a curse, saying, “Cursed is *every one* that *continueth* not in *all* things that are written in the book of the law, to *do* them^b.” We must not merely *wish* to do them, but actually *do* them; and not only *some*, but *all*; and that not *for a season* only, but *continually*, without interruption from first to last: and in default of this, *every one*, even every child of Adam, is cursed, even with an everlasting curse. As for any lighter penalty than this, it knows of none: it admits of no relaxation of it, no mitigation whatever: so that, of all that are under the law, there is not so much as one that is not under the curse and wrath of God. To hope for salvation, therefore, from such a law as this, is quite out of the question. A man in the contemplation of these threatenings can do nothing but lie down in despair, even as Paul himself did: for though, previously to his understanding the true tenour of the law, he supposed himself to be alive, he no sooner saw the extent of its commands, and the awfulness of its sanctions, than “he died,” and became sensible that he was nothing but a dead, condemned sinner before God^c.]

3. By its incapacity to afford us any remedy whatever—

[When it requires obedience, it does not offer us any strength for the performance of it: nor, when we have violated it in any respect, does it speak one word about repentance: nor does it make known to us any way whereby pardon may be obtained. The only thing which it says to any man is, “Do this, and live: offend, and die.” What hope, then, can any man entertain of salvation by such a law as this? It precludes a possibility of hope to any child of man: so that we must be dead to the law, not merely because the *Gospel* requires it, but because it is the very intent of the *law itself* to make us so: “*Through the law itself* we must become dead to the law.”]

We must not, however, imagine that all observance of the law is unnecessary: for the very reverse will appear, whilst we consider the law,

^a Rom. iii. 19.

^b Gal. iii. 10.

^c Rom. vii. 9.

II. In relation to our obedience to it—

As a covenant of works, the law doubtless is set aside: but *as a rule of life*, it is as much in force as ever: and, though delivered from its curse, we are bound as much as ever to obey it:

1. From a sense of gratitude—

[Will a man delivered from the law say, “I will continue in sin, that grace may abound?” No: if upright, we shall shudder at the thought. “We have not so learned Christ, if we have been taught of him.” On the contrary, the first dictate of our minds will be, “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me?” The love of Christ, in redeeming us from the law, will have a constraining influence upon us, and stimulate us to live to him who died for us^d. No other end than this did the Apostle Paul contemplate. He was not dead to the law, that he might live *to the world*, but “that he might live *unto God*:” and *to God* will every one live, who has a just sense of his mercy in giving us a better covenant, wherein we are called, not to earn life by our works, but to receive it as a gift in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.]

2. From a sense of duty—

[The law is still, and ever must be, the one standard of holiness to which we are to be conformed: and our obligation to obey it can never be reversed. God himself, if I may so speak, cannot dispense with our observance of it. It is of necessity our duty to love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. Our having a better covenant to *found our hopes upon*, can never abrogate the essential laws of our nature. If we be in heaven, earth, or hell, love must be our duty: and every man feels it to be his duty to walk according to that unerring and unchanging rule. Our freedom from the law, so far from being a reason for disregarding this rule, is the strongest reason for our most diligent adherence to it. St. Paul, by means of an easy illustration, places this matter in a clear light. He supposes us, in the first instance, married to the law; and afterwards, on the death of our husband, married to a second husband, the Lord Jesus Christ. But are we then content to be barren, as to the fruits of righteousness? No; quite the contrary: “Being dead to the law, we are married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, *that we should bring forth fruit unto God*. We are delivered from the law, that

^d 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^e Rom. xii. 1.

being dead wherein we were held, *that we should serve* in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter^f." Our obligation to obedience, so far from being relaxed by that change, is strongly and unalterably confirmed.]

3. From a sense of interest—

[Though we can never hope to be justified by our obedience to the law, our reward in heaven will be proportioned to our obedience. The day of judgment is appointed for the express purpose of manifesting the *righteousness* of God in all his dispensations. And, in reference to our obedience, we may safely say, "He that soweth plenteously shall reap plenteously; and he that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly." Now, the expectation of this issue remains with every man, whatever be his hopes in reference to his first acceptance with God. But with him who has trembled for his lost estate, and has fled for refuge to Christ as to the hope set before him in the Gospel, there will be an ardour of desire to secure a testimony in his favour. He will not be content to leave any thing in doubt. He is well assured, that "not the person who merely says to his Saviour, Lord, Lord, shall inherit the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of his Father that is in heaven." Having therefore this prospect, he will of necessity say, "What manner of person ought I to be, in all holy conversation and godliness!"]

The subject, as you see, lies deep: yet is it very important. To all then I would say, respecting the law, ENDEAVOUR,

1. To understand its nature—

[The generality regard it solely as a system of restraints and precepts. But, in truth, it is a covenant of life and death: of life to man in innocence; and of death, if I may so speak, to fallen man. It is now given, not to justify, but to condemn: not to save, but to kill; not to be a ground of hope to any, but "to shut men up to the Gospel," and to Christ as revealed in it^g, even to him who is "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth^h." I would to God that this matter were better understood. In fact, it is but rarely stated, even by those who, in the main, preach the Gospel: and it is owing to this that men's views of the Gospel are so very inadequate and superficial. But let me entreat of you to improve the instruction given you in relation to this matter. See that the law does nothing but curse you, yea, deservedly, and eternally curse you. See that the new

^f Rom. vii. 4, 6.

^g Gal. iii. 23.

^h Rom. x. 4.

covenant, that has been made with us in Christ Jesus, is our proper refuge, that we may flee to it, and lay hold upon it, and find acceptance by it: and let this covenant be all your salvation and all your desire.]

2. To fulfil its purposes—

[It was intended, as we have said, to drive you to Christ. Let it operate in this manner. Look not to it, for a single moment, as affording you any hope towards God. Be content to renounce, in point of dependence, your best actions, as much as your vilest sins: and look to Christ precisely as the wounded Israelites did to the brazen serpent in the wilderness. They did not attempt to combine with God's appointment any prescriptions of their own; but simply turned their eyes to that object, in faith. I pray you to bear this in mind, and to imitate their conduct in this respect. Fear not respecting the interests of holiness: they are well provided for in this blessed ordinance: and the more dead you are to the law, the more, I pledge myself, you will live unto your God.]

3. To honour its requirements—

[The world will have a jealousy on this head: they will always suppose, that if you do not seek for justification by the law, you have no motive for obeying it. Shew them how greatly they err in this respect. Indeed, they stand in this respect self-condemned: for at the moment that they complain of your *sentiments* as *licentious*, they find fault with your *lives* as *too strict and holy*. You are regarded by them as “righteous over-much;” and as making the way to heaven so strait, that none but yourselves can walk in it. This is as it should be; I mean, as far as it respects *you*; for it is in this way that you are to “make your light shine before men,” and to “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well-doing.”]

MMLVIII.

THE CHRISTIAN CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST.

Gal. ii. 20. *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

THE Gospel is, for the most part, plain and simple: yet are there some things in it which seem dark and contradictory. In one place St. Paul brings forward a long list of paradoxes, which to a superficial

reader would appear absurd in the extreme^a: but in all the sacred records there is not one so difficult of solution as that in our text^b. The Apostle is speaking on the subject of justification by faith alone, without the works of the law: and he mentions, that he had publicly reproved Peter for sanctioning by his example the idea that the observation of the law was still necessary. He says, that the law itself sufficiently shewed us the necessity of abandoning all hopes from that, and of seeking justification by faith in Christ alone: and then adds, that, in consequence of what Christ had done and suffered to deliver us from the law as a covenant of works, he considered himself as one dead to the law, and as having all his life and all his hopes in Christ alone. This is the plain import of the passage as divested of its paradoxical appearance. But as the paradox, when explained, will be very instructive, we shall enter into a fuller consideration of it; and shew,

I. In what respect the Christian is dead—

To understand in what sense the Apostle was “crucified with Christ,” we must particularly attend to the great ends for which Christ was crucified. Now Christ was crucified, in the first place, in order *to satisfy all the demands of the law*. The law required perfect obedience, and denounced a curse against every transgression of its precepts^c. Man, therefore, having transgressed the law, was utterly, and eternally, ruined. But Christ having undertaken

^a 2 Cor. vi. 8—10.

^b The difficulty of this passage seems needlessly increased in our translation. The second clause of the text stands thus; ζῶ δὲ οὐκ ἔτι ἐγὼ and it might be translated, “I am crucified with Christ; and I am alive no more.” The opposite truth then comes naturally; “I am alive no more; but Christ liveth in me.” The very position of the words in this antithesis seems to mark the propriety of this translation; ζῶ δὲ οὐκ ἔτι ἐγὼ ζῆν δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός. But by putting a stop after ζῶ δὲ, we make a *double* paradox, instead of a *single* one. The sense, however, is much the same, whichever way the passage is translated: but one would wish rather to lessen, than increase, its unavoidable obscurity.

^c Gal. iii. 10.

to restore him to the Divine favour, endured the curse which we had merited, and obeyed the precepts which we had violated: and thus rendered our salvation perfectly compatible with the honour of the Divine law; inasmuch as what we have failed to do or suffer in our own persons, we have done and suffered in our Surety. But Christ had a further end in submitting to crucifixion, namely, *to destroy sin*, and, by expiating its guilt, for ever to annul its power. This is frequently declared in Scripture, not only as the immediate end of his death^d, but as the end of the whole dispensation which he has introduced^e.

Now when St. Paul says, “I am crucified with Christ,” we must understand, that *there was something in his experience analogous to the crucifixion of Christ*; or, in other words, that as Christ died a violent death, to cancel the obligations of the law as a covenant, and to destroy sin, so the Apostle, by a holy violence upon himself, died *to the law* as a covenant, and *to sin* as the most hateful of all evils.

The believer then, according to this view of the subject, is dead,

1. To the law—

[Once all his hopes were founded on his obedience to the moral law; and he felt in his conscience a dread of God's wrath on account of his transgressions of its precepts. But now he abandons all his self-righteous hopes, and dismisses all his slavish fears, because he finds a better, yea, an assured, ground of hope in Christ's obedience unto death. He argues thus: ‘Does the law curse me for my manifold transgressions? Christ has endured its curse for me, and therefore I have no reason to fear it^f: “there is no condemnation to me, if only I am in Christ Jesus^g.” On the other hand, does the law require perfect unsinning obedience in order to my justification before God? Christ has paid it that obedience, and “brought in thereby an everlasting righteousness^h,” “which is unto all, and upon all them that believeⁱ.” I renounce therefore all hope in my own obedience, and found all my hopes of

^d Tit. ii. 14. 2 Cor. v. 15.

^f Gal. iii. 13.

^h Dan. ix. 24.

^e Rom. xiv. 9. Tit. ii. 12, 13.

^g Rom. viii. 1.

ⁱ Rom. iii. 22.

salvation on the obedience of my blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ^k.’

To this state he is brought, partly by the law itself, which cuts him off from all possible hope from his own obedience to it^l, and partly by the death of Christ, which has totally cancelled the law, as a covenant, for all those who believe in him: so that, as a woman is released from all obligation to her husband when he is dead, and may, if she please, unite herself to another; so the believer ceases to have any connexion with the law of God, now that it is cancelled by Christ^m: the law is dead to him; or, to use the language of our text, he is crucified to it.]

2. To sin—

[The believer, previous to his conversion, had no wish beyond the things of time and sense. He “walked according to the course of this world,” “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” He possibly might be pure from gross acts of sin; but all his actions, of whatever kind they were, sprang from *self*, and terminated in *self*: self-seeking, and self-pleasing, constituted the sum total of his life. He possessed no higher principle than self; the stream therefore could rise no higher than the fountain-head. But now he feels the influence of nobler principles, and determines to “live no longer to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. The time past suffices to have wrought his own willⁿ,” and henceforth he desires to have, not only every action, but “every thought, brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ^o.” He now “crucifies the flesh with the affections and lusts^p.” They form what the Scriptures call “the old man;” and this “old man is crucified with Christ, that *the body of sin may be destroyed*, that henceforth he should not serve sin^q.” Even the things that are innocent, are yet among the number of those things to which the believer is crucified. He enjoys them indeed; (for “God has given him all things richly to enjoy;”) but he will not be in bondage to them; he will not serve them; he will not regard them as constituting his happiness, no, nor as essential to his happiness: if he possess (as he may very innocently do) the pleasures, the riches, or the honours of the world, he does not set his affections upon them; he regards them rather with a holy jealousy, lest they should ensnare him, and alienate his heart

^k Phil. iii. 9. Rom. v. 19. 2 Cor. v. 21.

^l ver. 19. with Gal. iii. 24.

^m Rom. vii. 1—4.

ⁿ 1 Pet. iv. 2, 3.

^o 2 Cor. x. 5.

^p Gal. v. 24. This is spoken of *all* true Christians without exception.

^q Rom. vi. 6.

from God: he sits loose to them; and is willing to part with them at any moment, and in any manner, that his Lord shall call for them: in short, he regards the world, and every thing in it, as a crucified object, which once indeed was dear to him, but which he is now willing, if need be, to have buried out of his sight. He makes a conscience of fulfilling all his duties in the world, as much, or more than ever: but since he has learned how to appreciate the cross of Christ, “the world has become crucified unto him, and he unto the world^r.” Whatever is positively sinful in it, (however dear it once was to him,) is renounced and mortified^s; and even the most innocent things in it have *comparatively* lost all their value, and all their relish. His delight in heavenly things has rendered inferior things insipid; and his joy in God has eclipsed all sublunary joy.]

Nevertheless, the Christian lives: and to shew the truth of the paradox, we proceed to state,

II. In what manner he lives—

That he has the same life as the unregenerate, is obvious enough: but he has also a life different from theirs; and his whole manner of life is different from theirs: he lives a new life in, and through, Christ: he lives,

1. By the influences of his Spirit—

[He once was “dead in trespasses and sins:” but that same voice which bade Lazarus to come forth out of the grave, has bidden him live. The Lord Jesus has infused into his soul a new and living principle; and has “given him that living water, which is in his soul a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.” “Christ himself liveth in him,” and “is his very life^t.” This accounts for his being able to do things which no other man can. In *himself*, he is weak as other men; he cannot perform a good act^u, or speak a good word^x, or think a good thought^y; but by the almighty operation of Christ within him he can do all things^z. Being dead with Christ (as has been before shewn), he is risen and lives with him; according as it is written, “Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him: for in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God: likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord^a.”]

^r Gal. vi. 14.

^s Mark ix. 43—48.

^t Col. iii. 4.

^u John xv. 5.

^x Matt. xii. 34.

^y 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^z Phil. iv. 13.

^a Rom. vi. 9—11.

2. In dependence on his sacrifice—

[The atonement of Christ is the one ground of all the Christian's hopes. If he look for reconciliation with God, it is through the blood of the Redeemer's cross: if for peace, for strength, for any blessing whatsoever, he has no other plea than this; "My Lord and Saviour has bought it for me with his blood." He views every thing treasured up for him in Christ^b: and to him he goes, in order to "receive out of his fulness" whatsoever his necessities require^c. His whole life is "a life of faith on the Son of God." He never goes to God but in, and through, Christ: he never expects any blessing to flow down upon him, but *for the sake of* Christ, and *through* him, as the immediate channel of conveyance. The very life which he receives from Christ, he considers as purchased for him by Christ's obedience unto death: and on that very ground he presumes to "make Christ his wisdom, his righteousness, his sanctification, and his complete redemption."]

3. Under a sense of his love—

[The Christian is not contented with acknowledging the love of Christ to mankind in general; he views it especially as it respects himself; and delights in contemplating his own personal obligations to him. O how wonderful does it appear, that Christ should ever love such a one as him, and give himself for him! That for such a wretch as him, he should submit to all the shame and agonies of crucifixion! What incomprehensible breadths and lengths and depths and heights does he behold in this stupendous mystery! And what unsearchable riches does he seem to possess in this blessed assurance! It is *this* that animates him, *this* that "constrains him." Had he a thousand lives, he would dedicate them all to his service, and lay them down for his honour. And though he cannot perhaps at all times say, "My beloved *is* mine, and I *am* his," yet the most distant hope of such a mercy fills his soul with "joy unspeakable and glorified."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who object to the Gospel—

[Many there are, who, when we speak of being dead to the law, imagine that we are enemies to good works, and that the Gospel which we preach tends to licentiousness. It is true, we do say, (and we speak only what the Scriptures speak,) that though the law is still in force as a rule of duty, we are free from it as *a covenant of works*; and that in consequence of being free from it, the believer has neither hopes

^b Col. i. 19.

^c John i. 16.

nor fears arising from it. But are we therefore regardless of the interests of morality? Does not the Apostle himself say, that “he, through the law, was dead to the law?” Yet what does he conclude from this? That he might live as he pleased? No: he was, “dead to the law, *that he might live unto God.*” And then he repeats the same important truth; “I am crucified with Christ:” and again guards it against any similar misrepresentation, by shewing that the believer has a *strength for obedience* which no other person possesses, and *motives for obedience* which no other person feels. Let these two things be considered, and it will appear, that the Gospel, so far from militating against good works, is the only doctrine that secures the performance of them.

If this argument be not satisfactory, we ask the objector, What are those good works in which the declaimer about morality excels the believer? Yea, we ask, Whether they who renounce all dependence on their good works, be not the very people who are universally censured on account of the strictness and holiness of their lives? Away then with your objections; and know, that if the Gospel be excellent as a system, it is yet more excellent as advancing the interests of morality.]

2. Those who profess the Gospel—

[Religion consists not in the adoption of any creed, but in a radical change both of heart and life. The words before us sufficiently shew, that it is a matter of *experience*, and not of mere talk and profession. Hear the Apostle: “I am crucified with Christ;” “I live;” “Christ liveth in me;” “I live by faith;” “I live by faith of the Son of God, who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*.” All this has its seat, not in the head, but in the heart. Know therefore that, in order to ascertain the real state of your souls, you must inquire, not what principles you have imbibed, but how they operate; and whether in these respects you resemble this holy Apostle? Beloved, we entreat and charge you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, not to deceive yourselves with respect to this matter. To form a just estimate of your state, you must examine whether you be really dead to the law, and dead to sin; and whether, by the almighty operation of the Spirit of God within you, you are enabled to live to the glory of our blessed Lord and Saviour? These are the true tests of vital religion; and, according as your experience accords with them or not, your state will ultimately be determined at the judgment-seat of Christ.]

3. Those who obey the Gospel—

[It appears to others, and may sometimes even to ourselves, a painful thing to experience a continual crucifixion.

I confess, that the right eye being plucked out, and the right hand cut off, does imply a considerable degree of pain and self-denial. But we would ask, whether, in those seasons when the in-dwelling operation of Christ is plainly felt, and his unspeakable love in giving himself for you is distinctly seen, the exercise of self-denial be not both easy and pleasant? We ask, whether the joy arising from these discoveries do not far more than counterbalance any joy which you may be supposed to lose by abstaining from the gratifications of flesh and blood? We are sure that no difference of opinion can exist respecting these things, among those whose experience qualifies them to form a just judgment about them. We therefore hesitate not to say, "Be ye more and more crucified to the world and to sin:" "Live more and more by faith on the Son of God:" and let a sense of your personal obligations to him lead you to a more entire devotedness of yourselves to his service, till you are taken to serve him without ceasing in the world above.]

MMLIX.

DEPARTING FROM THE SIMPLE GOSPEL.

Gal. iii. 1. *O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?*

THE method of a sinner's justification is plainly revealed in the Gospel: nor is any doctrine more worthy of attention. An error with respect to many other points may consist with our salvation, but to err in this, is to destroy all hope of acceptance. Hence St. Paul devotes even an angel from heaven to a curse, if it could be supposed that one should be found who would introduce a gospel different from that which he himself had preached. Unhappily, however, the Galatians had been misled. The Apostle writes this epistle in order to reclaim them: he tells them that he had reprov'd even Peter himself, and that, too, before the whole Church at Antioch, for dissembling the truth^a. He then proceeds to reprove their declension also.

We shall consider,

^a Gal. ii. 13, 14.

I. Wherein their disobedience to the truth consisted—

The Galatians had formerly “received the truth in the love of it”—

[They had entertained the highest respect for him who first evangelized them^b; they had been knit to him with the most cordial affection^c; they had found much blessedness by means of the Gospel^d; they had received miraculous powers in confirmation of the word^e; they had been enabled to adorn their profession by a suitable life and conversation^f; they had even endured many sufferings for their attachment to the truth^g.]

But they had lately imbibed the doctrines of some Judaizing teachers—

[Many of the Jewish converts were still zealous for the law of Moses: hence they laboured to make proselytes wherever they came. Many of the Galatian churches were induced to embrace their doctrines: hence, though Gentiles originally, they put themselves under the yoke of the Jewish law^h.]

Thus they, in fact, “disobeyed and renounced the truth” itself—

[They had been taught to expect justification by faith in Christⁱ, but now they superadded an obedience to the law as a joint ground of hope: by this they declared that faith in Christ was insufficient for their justification. They did not indeed intend by this to reject Christ entirely; but the Apostle tells them repeatedly that God considered their conduct as equivalent to an utter rejection of the Gospel^k; and hence he warns them, that they were turned altogether to “another Gospel^l.”]

Their defection therefore involved them in the deepest guilt; as will appear more fully, if we consider,

II. The particular aggravation with which it was attended—

St. Paul himself had preached among them in a most lively and affecting manner—

[Wherever he went, his constant subject was Christ crucified^m: he fully opened to his hearers the nature and

^b Gal. iv. 14.

^c Gal. iv. 15.

^d Gal. iv. 15.

^e Gal. iii. 2.

^f Gal. v. 7.

^g Gal. iii. 4.

^h Gal. iv. 8—10.

ⁱ Gal. ii. 16.

^k Gal. ii. 21. and v. 2—4.

^l Gal. i. 6.

^m 1 Cor. ii. 2.

ends of Christ's death: he always declared the efficacy of it as an atonement for sin: he earnestly exhorted all to trust in it for their acceptance with God: he had dwelt so much, and in so affecting a manner, on this subject, that the crucifixion of Christ might be said to have been depicted, or even exhibited before their eyes.]

This was a great aggravation of their guilt in departing from the faith—

[Had they heard less of Christ, they had been less culpable; had they heard of him in a less affecting manner, they had not been without a plea; had they seen no particular effects flowing from the Apostle's preaching, they might have had some excuse; had the subserviency of the law to the Gospel never been opened to them, their defection from the truth might have been accounted for: but to renounce the truth, after it had been set forth with such energy, and attended with such effects, was extreme folly and wickedness: their conduct was no less than a crucifying of Christ afreshⁿ.]

What animadversion their disobedience merited we may see in,

III. The reproof which the Apostle gave them on account of it—

St. Paul ascribes their declension to the subtlety of their false teachers—

[Sin has an astonishingly fascinating power^o. Error, whether in faith or practice, soon insinuates itself into our hearts. Whenever people are drawn from the truth, they are first beguiled by the specious appearances of false principles. Apostates therefore may be justly considered as deluded creatures; and if at any time they be recovered, they wonder at themselves how they ever could have been so “bewitched,” so blinded, so befooled.]

Nevertheless he deservedly censures their compliance with them—

[He was far from indulging a contemptuous or vindictive spirit, yet he judged it his duty to “rebuke them sharply:” he therefore spoke of their conduct with holy indignation: he expressed his wonder that they could be so soon turned from the truth^p: he seems at a loss to represent their folly in terms sufficiently humiliating; yet his question evidently imports

ⁿ Heb. vi. 6.

^o This seems the exact import of the original.

^p Gal. i. 6.

also a mixture of pity : he felt deeply in his soul for their spiritual welfare^q; he therefore expostulated with them in order to reclaim them.]

INFERENCES—

1. How great is the evil and danger of self-righteousness !

[The Galatians intended to honour God's own institutions; but by laying an undue stress upon them they endangered their own salvation. How careful then should we be not to trust in any righteousness of our own ! Let us remember in what light our own righteousness should be viewed^r— let us bear in mind our Saviour's direction^s— let us cultivate the disposition of the great Apostle^t—]

2. What need have even the most eminent Christians to watch against apostasy !

[The attainments of the Galatians seemed to be very eminent: yet they were soon seduced from the simplicity of the Gospel. Who then are we, that we should be over confident? Our dearest friends may well regard us as Paul did the Christians at Corinth^u. Let us attend then to the advice which he gives us^x— nor let us despise that salutary admonition of St. Peter^y—]

3. What cause of thankfulness have they who are kept steadfast in the truth !

[They who know their own instability will wonder that they are kept at all. Surely such will adopt the grateful acknowledgment of David^z— and these are the persons in whom that declaration shall be verified^a— We conclude with that suitable doxology^b—]

^q Gal. iv. 19.

^r Isai. lxiv. 6.

^s Luke xvii. 10.

^t Phil. iii. 9.

^u 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^x 1 Cor. x. 12.

^y 2 Pet. iii. 17.

^z Ps. xxvi. 12.

^a 1 Pet. i. 5.

^b Jude, ver. 24, 25.

MMLX.

THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO ABRAHAM.

Gal. iii. 8, 9. *The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.*

THE point which St. Paul above all things labours to establish, especially in his Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians, is the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The Jews universally were adverse to this doctrine, because it derogated, as they thought, from the honour of their law. And the Gentiles also were hostile to it, because it cut off from them all occasion of boasting in themselves. But the more the unbelieving world set themselves against it, the more this holy Apostle strove to place it beyond all contradiction or doubt. And well he might, since on the reception or rejection of it depends the everlasting salvation of every child of man. Let it not therefore be deemed superfluous, if on a point of such infinite importance we follow him, and bring it before you in a variety of views. If we have already received it, we still need to be confirmed in it from time to time, lest by any means we be drawn aside from it. There is something “bewitching” in the idea of meriting salvation at the hands of God; and we are but too apt to listen to any statement which shall so flatter the pride of our hearts. Many converts belonging to the Churches of Galatia, after having been for a time established in the truth, were at last turned aside from it; and drew from the Apostle this spirited remonstrance; “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?” He appeals to them, that the miracles which he had wrought among them, as also the miraculous powers which they had received through his instrumentality, were all in confirmation of this doctrine; by which, in fact, Abraham himself had been saved; and by which alone they could ever be partakers of Abraham’s felicity. This, he tells them, was the unvaried testimony of Scripture; and it had been declared two thousand years before to Abraham, in those most memorable words, “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”

In discoursing on these words, we will shew,

I. What was that Gospel which the Scripture preached to Abraham—

Abraham was informed, that “in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed”—

[This was repeatedly declared to him, and at an interval of nearly fifty years^a. The full import of this promise was not clearly revealed in the declaration itself; but it was doubtless made known to him by the Spirit of God, and was typically represented to him in the sacrifice of his son Isaac. By the command of God, he took his own son, *the child of promise*, in order to offer him up as a burnt-offering to the Lord. On this his son he laid the wood which was to reduce him to ashes; he led him to Mount Moriah (the very place where the Promised Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, was afterwards offered); he bound him, and, *in purpose and intention*, offered him up a sacrifice to God: and then, having actually offered up the ram which God had substituted in the place of Isaac, he received his son as from the dead^b: and thus was taught, that, by the death and resurrection of the Promised Seed, the blessings of salvation were to be brought to a ruined world. Such was the view given him of this great mystery; and by his faith in the Promised Seed so “dying for our offences, and so raised again for our justification,” he was justified, as all his believing posterity shall also be^c.

Here it is particularly to be remembered, that the law bore no part in his justification; for it was not given till four hundred and thirty years after the promise of a Saviour had been made to him, and by faith in that promised Saviour he had been justified. It must be remembered also, that circumcision bore no part in his justification; for no less than twenty-four years elapsed between the period of his being justified by faith, and the appointment of that rite^d. It is of the utmost importance that these things be borne in mind: for, if we once admit the idea of his being either in whole or in part justified by any thing but faith, we shall subvert the Gospel altogether; seeing that there is but one method of a sinner's justification *before God* for him and for us^e. True it is, that *before men* he was justified by his obedience, as St. James has truly said^f: for it was by the fruits which his faith produced, that it was seen to be a living, and not a dead, faith: but in the sight of God he had nothing of his own whereon to place the least dependence: it was by faith only, without any work whatever of his own, that he was counted righteous before God: and, if it had not been so, his salvation had been, not a gift of

^a Gen. xii. 3. and xviii. 18. and xxii. 18.

^b Heb. xi. 17—19.

^c Rom. iv. 22—25.

^d Compare Gen. xii. 3, 4. with Gen. xvii. 1, 7, 10, 23, 24.

^e See Rom. iv. 9—14.

^f Jam. ii. 21—23.

grace, but a reward of debt, to which he was entitled, and in which he would to all eternity have had a ground of glorying before God^g.]

In this promise “the Gospel was preached to him”—

[This way of salvation is emphatically and exclusively called “*the Gospel*.” It was *glad tidings* to Abraham, when taken out of an idolatrous state, and ignorant of any means of acceptance with God, to be informed, that God had provided a Saviour for him; and that, through a person who should descend from his loins, a righteousness should be brought in, fully adequate to the necessities of the whole world, and certainly effectual for all who should believe in him. To that event he looked forward; and, beholding it by faith, he greatly rejoiced in it^h. And this is glad tidings to us also: for where should we find a Saviour, if this promised Seed had not been given? Or what hope should we have had of ultimate salvation, if we had been required to earn it in any measure by our own works? Were it required of us to produce only one single work on which to rest our claim of heaven, where should we find one? But, blessed be God, we are taught to rely on the Promised Seed, and on him alone: and it is this very circumstance which warrants us to expect eternal happiness; since, unworthy as we are, the free promise of God, duly apprehended by faith, can never fail of its accomplishmentⁱ.]

Such was the Gospel which the Scripture preached to Abraham: nor does it differ at all from,

II. What it preaches unto us also—

It declares to us,

1. That this is the way which God has ordained for us also—

[“The Scripture,” that is, the Holy Spirit who spake by it, “foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached this Gospel to Abraham.” There was not to be one way of salvation for him, and another for us; but one and the same for both. And as God foresaw that men would be ready to catch hold of any thing that might afford in ever so slight a degree a ground of glorying, he took care to cut off all occasion for glorying, by justifying Abraham solely through faith, whilst yet he remained in an uncircumcised state: thus shewing to the uncircumcised of all nations, that, in relation to the great matter of their justification before God, they were

^g Rom. iv. 1—5.

^h John viii. 56.

ⁱ Rom. iv. 16.

on a perfect equality with the circumcised; and that, as faith alone was available for Abraham's salvation, so it would avail for the salvation of all who truly relied upon the Promised Seed^k. True it is, we are to "walk in the steps of our father Abraham," and not to imagine that we can be saved by a dead inoperative faith^l: but still it is by faith only that we become children of Abraham, and by faith only that we become partakers of his blessings^m: if we seek these benefits in any other way, "we frustrate the grace of God, and cause the death of Christ to be in vainⁿ." In the very same promise then that the Gospel was preached to Abraham, it is preached to *us*: to every one of *us* it is said, "In the Promised Seed shalt *thou* be blessed." And with this agrees the testimony of St. Paul, who, specifying distinctly all the great blessings which the Gospel offers to us, tells us, about nine times in eleven verses, that it is all "in Christ," "in Christ," "in Christ^o."]

2. That all who embrace it shall be partakers of its blessings—

[There is no exception whatever; no difference between Jews and Gentiles: if only we "be of faith, we are from that moment blessed with all the blessings which Abraham himself enjoyed." Was he justified? So shall we be. Was he made "the friend of God?" So shall we be. Was God to him "a shield, an exceeding great reward?" Such will he be to us also. Is Abraham now "in the kingdom of his God? We also shall, with him and Isaac and Jacob, sit down there," yea, and shall be "in Abraham's bosom" to all eternity. All this, and infinitely more than we can either utter or conceive, shall we receive, if we truly believe in Christ: for "all things are ours, if we be Christ's^p."]

From hence we may SEE,

1. The antiquity of the Gospel—

[In every age the doctrine of justification by faith only is stigmatized as a *new* doctrine: it is very generally represented as such amongst ourselves: and so it was by the Papists at the time of the Reformation: in the apostolic age it was regarded in the same light. When "St. Paul preached Jesus and the resurrection, it was asked, what this *new* doctrine meant^q." But it is as old as Abraham, to whom it was distinctly preached: yea, it must be traced to the time of Adam; for to him also was it preached, when he was told that "the Seed of

^k Rom. iii. 30.

^l Rom. iv. 12. with Jam. ii. 20, 24, 26.

^m ver. 7, 9.

ⁿ Gal. ii. 21.

^o Eph. i. 3—13.

^p 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23. ^q Acts xvii. 18, 19.

the woman should bruise the serpent's head." That persons who have the Scriptures in their hands should speak of this as a new doctrine, is perfectly surprising; since it is written in every page of the sacred volume as with a sun-beam: but that a member of the Established Church should be so ignorant, is yet more astonishing: since it is that essential and fundamental doctrine on which the very edifice of our Church is built. Let not any therefore reject this doctrine; or at least let them not call themselves members of the Church of England, if they do. The way of justification by faith is "the good old way," in which all the saints of God have gone from the foundation of the world; and it is the only way in which any man can "find rest unto his soul."]

2. The excellency of the Gospel—

[The idea of being saved by faith only, is so simple, that the world can see no excellency in it: but this very simplicity constitutes a very distinguished part of its excellency. Supposing that salvation had been by works, or by faith and works united, who would ever have been able to ascertain what measure of good works would suffice for us, or what measure of imperfection would consist with their ultimate acceptance? Verily, under such uncertainty, no human being could enjoy one hour's peace in the prospect of his great account: but when we are told that salvation is by faith only, then, whatever our works may have been in times past, we have peace in our souls the very instant we believe; because we know that Christ is "able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him:" we know that "by faith we are Abraham's children;" and that "all the blessings of Abraham ARE ours," and shall be ours for ever^r.

But the excellency of the Gospel appears no less in the fruits that it produces. Abraham was justified the first moment he believed. And did he on that account become indifferent to good works? See his conduct: he immediately went forth from his family and country at the command of God, though he knew not whither he was to go. In every place where he went, he built an altar to his God: and, even when called to sacrifice with his own hands his beloved Isaac, he hesitated not, but for three successive days prosecuted his journey to the place where the offering was to be made, and executed without reluctance the Divine command. So shall we do, if we truly believe in Christ. There will be no reserves in our hearts; nothing which we will not do, nothing which we will not sacrifice, nothing which we will not suffer, if only our God may be glorified thereby. Let the world produce a list of

worthies like those recorded in the Epistle to the Hebrews, or like the holy Apostles, and shew that they were actuated by a different principle from that of faith in Christ, and then will we confess that the Gospel is not so excellent as it is said to be: but till that is done, we must affirm, that in point of practical efficacy it has no rival; and that in comparison of it the whole world is only as dung and dross.]

MMLXI.

THE SPIRITUALITY AND SANCTIONS OF THE LAW.

Gal. iii. 10. *As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*

THE reason that Christianity is so little understood, is, that men are not aware of the occasion which there is for such a dispensation as the Gospel contains. They know not the state in which they are by nature; and therefore they cannot comprehend the provision made for their recovery from it by grace. If the generality of Christians were asked what God requires of them in his law, or what is now the proper use of the law, they would be able to give, at best, a very imperfect, and probably a very erroneous, account of these things. But it is of the utmost importance that we should understand the law: for, till we do, we can never understand the Gospel.

Now, in the words which we have read, we see,

I. The requirements of God's law—

[The law is contained in the Ten Commandments: and the summary given of it by our Lord is, that we must love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves.]

Now consider what is comprehended in these two commandments — — — and remember, the obedience to be paid to them must be perfect (“in all things”); personal (by “every one of us”); and perpetual (we must “continue in” it, from the first to the latest hour of our life). It is not sufficient that we wish to do them: we must “do them;” do them “all;” “every one of us;” and “continue” so to do, even to the end.

This was written under the law^a; and it is confirmed to us by the Apostle's citation of it under the Gospel. Now we must remember, that on our perfect obedience to it all its promises are suspended; and if, in any one instance, even in thought or desire, we fall short of it, we must then be considered as violators of the law. This is a point not sufficiently considered. St. Paul himself did not clearly understand it, previous to his conversion. He interpreted the law only in its literal sense; and could not conceive that such an one as he had ever violated its commands: but when he saw that it forbade an inordinate desire as much as an overt act, he then saw that he was condemned by it, and had forfeited all hope of acceptance by his obedience to it^b.]

But, to understand the law aright, we must know,

II. The sanctions with which it is enforced—

[It denounces a curse on every, the least, violation of its commands: "*Cursed* is every one," &c. What this curse is, we may know from other passages of Holy Writ. It was said to Adam, in reference to the forbidden fruit, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Now, from the moment of his transgression he became mortal as to his body: (for "death entered by sin;" and never would have entered, if man had not sinned:) his soul, also, became spiritually dead to God; and he was doomed to "the second death," in "the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." To this the Apostle Paul bears testimony, when he says, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord^c." Perhaps it may assist us more, if we consider what the penalty of transgression was to the fallen angels: they were cast out of heaven from the presence of their God; and were consigned to "a lake of fire prepared on purpose for them," there to endure for ever the vengeance of their offended God. Thus man, on his fall, lost the favour and presence of God, and was subjected to his heavy and everlasting displeasure. Being a partaker with the angels in their offence, he became a partaker with them in their punishment.

Now let every one that has transgressed the law in ever so small a degree, though it may have been only once, consider what the law says to him: it says, "*Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them.*"]

This, I say, is,

III. The tremendous inference that must be drawn in relation to every one of us—

^a Deut. xxvii. 26.

^b Rom. vii. 7, 9.

^c Rom. vi. 23.

[We all are under the law. The law was given to man in Paradise. It was written in his heart, when he came out of his Creator's hands. We all, therefore, are under it; and, consequently, "every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God^d."

If this inference be not true, I would ask, which of the premises is erroneous?

Does the law require less than I have stated? If any one think so, let him tell me where God has dispensed with any one of its commandments? Where has he authorized us to alienate from him any measure of that love which he had required in his law? or where has he lowered the standard of our love to man; and permitted us to act otherwise towards him, than we, in a change of circumstances, should think it right that he should act towards us?

If the requirements of the law are not reduced, are its sanctions altered? Has God any where revoked them? Has he not, on the contrary, expressly said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die^e?"

If its requirements are not altered, nor its sanctions revoked, can you say you are not under it? The whole race of mankind are under it: and must continue under it, till they lay hold on that better covenant which God has given us in his Gospel.

There is, then, no possibility of evading the inference that is here drawn; namely, that as many as are under the law, and consequently the whole race of mankind, are under the curse. O! remember this, ye old; it curses *you*: ye young; it curses *you*: ye moral; it curses *you*. There is not a child of man to whom it does not say, "*Thou art cursed.*"

Who, then, must not SEE,

1. The folly of seeking to be justified by the works of the law?

[If you had sinned but once, and then only in thought, you would be cursed, as a violator of God's law; and, consequently, be without hope of obtaining salvation by it. For, if you would be saved by it, you must first atone for your offences against it; and then obey it perfectly in future. But which of these can ye do? If ye were to shed rivers of tears, they could never wash away one sin. The whole race of mankind would never be able to atone for one sin. And suppose your past offences forgiven; which of you, for a single day or hour, could fulfil the law perfectly in future? Know, that this would be an hopeless attempt; and that, consequently, "by the works

^d Rom. iii. 19.

^e Ezek. xviii. 20.

of the law can no flesh living be justified^f." St. Paul himself renounced all hope of acceptance with God by any righteousness of his own, and sought it solely by faith in Christ^g: and so must you, if ever you would obtain mercy at the hands of God^h.]

2. The happiness of those who have obtained an interest in Christ?

[They are dead to the law; and the law is dead to themⁱ. To them is no condemnation^k: on the contrary, they have, and ever shall possess, eternal life^l. In all the book of God there cannot be found one curse denounced against them. To them belong nothing but blessings, even all the blessings of grace and glory. Say, beloved, Are not these happy? Seek ye, then, this happiness. Flee to Christ: believe in Christ: and then ye "shall never perish, but shall have eternal life."]

3. The reasonableness of a life devoted to Christ?

[Contemplate the benefits you receive by faith in Christ; and say, whether any return that ye can make can ever be too great? To tell you, that, if you believe in Christ, you *must* obey him, is, I had almost said, to degrade human nature below the beasts. Does "the ox know its owner, and the ass his master's crib;" and shall a *believer* NOT know, and love, and serve, his heavenly Benefactor? Shall the Lord Jesus Christ have "bought you with his blood, and you not desire to glorify him with your bodies and your spirits, which are his?" O! brethren, do not oblige me to say, you *must* obey him; but "be forward of yourselves," and give yourselves wholly to him; and let the inquiry of your soul, every day and hour, be, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits conferred upon me?"]

^f Rom. iii. 20.

^h Rom. ix. 31, 32. and x. 3, 4.

^k Rom. viii. 1.

^g Phil. iii. 9.

ⁱ Rom. vii. 1—4. ii. 19.

^l John iii. 16, 18.

MMLXII.

REDEMPTION BY CHRIST.

Gal. iii. 13. *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.*

THE law, which subjects all mankind to a curse, is the moral law; that is principally intended in the

passage before us^a : it remains unalterable in its demands of obedience or punishment. But in the Gospel a remedy is provided for transgressors : this remedy is proposed to us in the text.

I. Clear up some points relative to redemption—

The most important truths of Christianity are often denied ; but we must be established in them, if we would receive the blessings of redemption. We should know clearly,

1. What is that “ curse ” from which we are redeemed—

[Many suppose it to be annihilation, or at most a temporary punishment ; but the Scriptures represent it in a far different light : we cannot precisely declare the exact *quality* of it ; it consists, however, partly in banishment from God^b, and partly in inconceivable anguish both of soul and body^c. Its *duration* certainly will be eternal ; it will continue coeval with the happiness of the righteous^d ; neither the curse shall cease, nor sinners cease to endure it^e.]

2. Who is it that redeems us from it—

[It is thought by many that we must deliver ourselves by repentance, &c. But it is impossible for fallen man to deliver his own soul : he cannot *by doing*, because he cannot perfectly obey the law in future ; and if he could, his obedience would not atone for past sins^f : he cannot *by suffering*, because the penalty of one sin is eternal death. Nor could the highest archangel redeem the world ; if he could, God needed not to have sent his own Son. None but “ Christ ” was sufficient for so great a work ; but his obedience unto death has effected our redemption ; he “ made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness^g.”]

^a It is that law, from the curse of which Abraham and the Gentiles were redeemed, ver. 10 ; and consequently, though the *ceremonial* law be not entirely excluded, the text must be understood principally in reference to the *moral* law.

^b 2 Thess. i. 9.

^c Luke xvi. 23, 24.

^d Matt. xxv. 46. *αἰώνιον* is used respecting both.

^e Our Lord repeats this no less than five times in six verses, Mark ix. 43—48.

^f The ceasing to increase a debt will not cancel a debt already incurred : see Luke xvii. 10.

^g Dan. ix. 24.

3. Who they are that shall enjoy the benefits of redemption—

[Many imagine that, because Christ has died for all, all shall be saved; but redemption is by no means so extensive as the curse. With respect to heathens we know little how God will deal with them; but we know what will be his conduct towards the Christian world: they who believe in Christ, and they only, will be finally saved^h; such alone were comprehended under the term “us.”]

These points being cleared up, we shall,

II. Shew by what means we are redeemed—

By the Mosaic law persons hanged were deemed accursedⁱ. Hence Christ, in his death, was “made a curse” or held accursed^k. In becoming a curse, he was our substitute—

[Christ did not die merely *for our good*; he endured the curse *in our stead*. This was typically represented under the Mosaic law^l: — — — the prophets concur in establishing this truth^m; — — — the Apostles confirm it in the plainest termsⁿ — — — His curse indeed was not *the same* with ours, either in quality or duration; yet it was fully adequate to all the demands of law and justice; and it was such as God appointed for him, and accepts on our behalf.]

This substitution of Christ was the mean of effecting our redemption—

[God ordained it for this very end^o. He was pleased with it in this view^p. He was reconciled to man on account of it^q. Our redemption is expressly ascribed to it^r. Our deliverance from the guilt and power of sin is effected by it^s. It was the price paid for the salvation of the church^t.]

^h Mark xvi. 16. The faith here spoken of is not a mere assent to the truths of Christianity, but a living, operative, and purifying faith, Acts xv. 9. Jam. ii. 20, 26.

ⁱ Deut. xxi. 23.

^k See the words immediately following the text.

^l Lev. xvi. 7—10, 21, 22. It is impossible not to see in this passage that the scape-goat had the iniquities of the Jewish nation transferred to him, while the goat that died made atonement for them.

^m Dan. ix. 26. “*Not for himself*,” Isai. liii. 5.

ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 21. 1 Pet. ii. 24. & iii. 18.

^o Rom. iii. 25.

^p Eph. v. 2.

^q Rom. v. 10.

^r Eph. i. 7.

^s Heb. ix. 13, 14.

^t Acts xx. 28. with 1 Cor. vi. 20.

INFER—

1. How great was the love of Christ towards our fallen race!

[That he who was happy in the bosom of his Father should become a curse! That he should submit to such misery in our place and stead! Well might that anathema be denounced against the ungrateful^u— Let us then study to “comprehend the heights and depths of his love.”]

2. What folly and impiety is it to seek justification by the law!

[When the moral law was once broken, it was absolutely impossible that any man should be justified by it^x. There remained no way of escaping its curse but by embracing the Gospel^y. What folly then is it to reject salvation when it is freely offered, and to seek it in a way in which it cannot be found! Nor is the impiety of the conduct less than the folly. It declares that the sacrifice of Christ was unnecessary, or ineffectual. This conduct proved destructive to the bulk of the Jewish nation^z. May we never imitate them to our eternal ruin!]

3. How strong are the Christian's obligations to holiness!

[Christ did not die to deliver us from the curse only, but from sin also^a. Shall we hope to attain one end of his death while we defeat the other? We should reject such a thought with the utmost abhorrence^b. Let every one then strive to attain the disposition of St. Paul^c—]

^u 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

^x Gal. iii. 21.

^y Gal. iii. 22.

^z Rom. ix. 31, 32, & x. 3.

^a Tit. ii. 14.

^b Rom. vi. 1.

^c 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

MMLXIII.

THE USES OF THE LAW.

Gal. iii. 19. *Wherefore then serveth the law?*

PERHAPS, of all the subjects connected with religion, there is not one so rarely unfolded to Christian auditories as the law. We are ready to suppose, either that men are sufficiently acquainted with it; or that it is antiquated, and unnecessary to be known.

But the law lies at the foundation of all true religion; and it ought to be studied, in the *first* place, as alone opening the way to the true knowledge of the Gospel. The mistakes which obtain in reference to it are very numerous. In truth, there are but few persons who have just views respecting it: and, on that account, I propose to call your attention to it throughout this series of discourses. I am aware, that persons deeply impressed with any particular subject are apt to magnify its importance beyond due bounds: and, being aware of this, I will endeavour to avoid that error on the present occasion. But I feel that it is scarcely possible to speak too strongly respecting the importance of the law. Those, indeed, who have never considered it, will possibly be somewhat staggered at the positions which I shall be necessitated to maintain in this my introductory discourse: and the rather, because the *full* proof of my assertions must, of necessity, be deferred to those discourses wherein the several parts will be more largely considered. But should this impression be unfortunately made on any of my hearers, I must request that their ultimate decision be suspended, till the subject has undergone the proposed investigation. As for those who are conversant with the subject, I have no fear but that they will go along with me in my statement, and concur with me in the sentiments which shall be submitted to them.

In the epistle before us, the Apostle Paul is maintaining a controversy with the Judaizing teachers; who wished to combine the Law with the Gospel, as a joint ground of hope before God. In order to rectify their views, he shews, that, if they would make their works, whether ceremonial or moral, in any degree the ground of their hopes, they must stand altogether on the footing of the law, which prescribed perfect obedience as the way to life; and must renounce all interest in the covenant which was made with their father Abraham, and which promised life to men by believing in the Promised Seed. Upon this, they naturally ask, “Wherefore, then, serveth

the law?" that is, 'If we are not to be saved by the law, for what end did Moses give us the law? What end can it answer?'

Now, to this inquiry I purpose to address myself. My first point will be, to shew *the incalculable importance of the inquiry itself*; and then, in my future discourses, to *give what I conceive to be the true answer to it*.

To mark the vast importance of the inquiry will sufficiently occupy us at this time. But, really, I scarcely know in what terms to state it, if indeed I would state it with becoming fidelity. I have already said, that the knowledge of the law is at the foundation of all true religion: and I hope to convince all who will candidly investigate the subject, that without a clear, distinct knowledge of the law we can have *no just sentiments, no proper feelings, no scriptural hopes*. And, whilst I attempt this arduous discussion, may Almighty God pour out upon us his Holy Spirit, to give to every one of us the seeing eye, the hearing ear, the understanding heart, and ultimately to guide our feet into the way of peace!

First, then, let me say, that without a distinct knowledge of the law we can have *no just sentiments*. Of course, I confine this, and all my observations, to religion; for of things that are merely civil or moral it is beside my purpose to speak at all. And I wish this to be borne in mind, throughout my whole discourse: for otherwise I shall appear to run into a very erroneous excess.

It must be remembered, that I speak only of the *moral* law; as I shall shew more fully in my next discourse. For with the ceremonial law there is no such connexion as I am about to trace, nor any necessary reference to it in my text.

I say, then, that without a distinct knowledge of the moral law we can have no just sentiments respecting *God and his perfections*, or *Christ and his offices*, or *the Holy Spirit and his operations*.

Let us proceed to illustrate this.

It will be readily acknowledged, that the *holiness*

of the Deity is, and must be, marked in the law, which he has given for the government of his rational creation : and, if we suppose that law to be a perfect transcript of his mind and will ; if we suppose it to extend to every action, word, and thought, and to require, that in the habit of our minds we shall retain all that purity in which we were originally created, and preserve to our latest hour God's perfect image upon our souls ; if it admit not of the slightest possible deviation or defect, no, not even through ignorance or inadvertence ; if it promise nothing to us but after a spotless adherence to its utmost demands from first to last ; it will, of course, be seen that he is indeed a holy Being, that cannot look upon iniquity without the utmost abhorrence. But, if we suppose his law to require any thing less than this, and to admit of any thing short of absolute perfection, we must, of necessity, conceive of him as less abhorrent of sin, in proportion to the degree in which he lowers his own demands, and in which he leaves us at liberty to depart from this high standard, the standard which he proposed to man in Paradise, and which he still ordains for the angels that are around his throne.

In like manner, if we suppose that the sanctions with which he enforces his law are strong and awful ; if we suppose that they involve nothing less than the everlasting happiness or misery of every child of man ; if we suppose that one single defect, of whatever kind, forfeits all title to happiness, and involves the soul in irremediable guilt and misery ; if we suppose that these sanctions can never be set aside, never mitigated, never cease to operate through all eternity ; we shall, of necessity, have a high idea of God's *justice*, which will never relax the smallest atom of its demands, either in reference to the obedience of man, or the execution of the threatenings denounced against him. But, if we have an idea that God will overlook some slighter imperfections, or punish them only for a time, and *that* too in a way which may be found supportable by feeble man ; we,

of course, proportionably lower our ideas of divine justice, and accommodate our views of it to the standard of human imperfection.

Respecting his *mercy*, also, we may make the same observations. If we suppose the guilt that man has contracted to be beyond all measure and conception great, and the judgments to which he is exposed to be commensurate with his deviations from God's perfect law; if we suppose his sins to be more in number than the sands upon the sea shore; and every one of those sins to be deserving of God's eternal wrath and indignation; then we shall indeed stand amazed at the mercy of God, who, instead of executing his threatened vengeance, has provided a remedy for the whole world; a remedy suited to their wants, and sufficient for their necessities; a remedy, whereby he may restore them to his favour, not only without compromising the honour of his other perfections, but to the everlasting advancement of them all. Yes, truly, with such views of his law, we shall magnify his mercy, that can pardon so much guilt, and relieve from so much misery, and exalt to glory such unworthy creatures. But, if we suppose man's offences to have been comparatively few, and his desert of vengeance to be comparatively light, who does not see that we reduce almost to nothing the mercy of our God, which has been so little needed, and which has effected for us so inconsiderable a deliverance? I think that there is nothing strained in this statement, nothing which must not approve itself to every candid mind: and I am the more concerned that this view should be clearly understood, because it will open the way for a just apprehension of what I have yet further to offer under this head.

I proceed then to observe, that, without a clear knowledge of the law we can have no just views of *Christ and his offices*. From whence arose a necessity for a Saviour? was it not because we were condemned by the law, and incapable either of atoning for our past sins, or of restoring ourselves to the Divine image? Now, suppose our guilt to have been

exceeding great ; and that every deviation from God's perfect law brought upon us a curse, an everlasting curse, under the wrath of Almighty God : suppose, too, that the demands of law and justice could never be satisfied without the punishment of the offender, either in his own person, or in the person of an adequate surety ; then, in exact proportion as you magnify our guilt and misery, you magnify the Saviour, who by the sacrifice of himself has restored us to the Divine favour : and in proportion as you diminish our necessities, you depreciate the value of his atonement. Again, conceive of the law as never satisfied without a perfect obedience to its commands, and as requiring every soul to possess, either in himself or in his surety, a righteousness commensurate with its highest demands ; then will Christ be proportionably exalted, in that he has wrought out a righteousness for all who shall believe in him, and that, through his righteousness, a way of salvation is opened for every child of man. But reduce that righteousness to any lower standard—say, to sincere, but imperfect, obedience ; your need of Christ for this end is proportionably reduced, and your obligation to him almost altogether cancelled.

But take a larger view of his offices : conceive of him as a Prophet, who is to instruct us ; a Priest, that is to atone for us ; a King, that is to rule over us : what comparative need is there of his instructions, if so defective a knowledge of his religion will suffice ? What need of his sacrifice, if repentance and reformation can restore us to God's favour ? And what need of his government, if so little is to be effected in our behalf, either in a way of deliverance from sin, or in a way of effective renovation ? The less that is required of man himself, the less must of necessity be required of his Surety : and, consequently, the whole work of Christ, whether for us or in us, must be reduced, in proportion as we reduce the demands of the law, and the necessities of man.

The same reasoning must be applied to the *operations of the Holy Spirit* : The less is required of us,

the less there is for him to do within us. And hence it is, that many deny the necessity of his influences altogether, either for the illumination of our minds, or the sanctification of our souls. The truth is, that the whole denial of the doctrine of the Trinity, and of all the doctrines dependent on it—the doctrine of the atonement, of imputed righteousness, and of divine influences—must be traced to this source. Men feel not their need of a *Divine* Saviour: they feel not the need of an *Almighty* Agent, to work in them the whole work of God. Hence their principles of theology are brought down to the low standard of the Pelagian, Arian, and Socinian hypotheses. Let but a person obtain a thorough insight into the spirituality of the law, he will see that their meagre systems can never supply *his* wants, never afford a remedy suited to *his* necessities. If any one less than God himself undertake to effect his salvation, he sees that he must inevitably perish: and, if he had none but a creature to rely upon, glad would he be to be permitted to take his portion under rocks and mountains.

Having established, I trust, the truth of my first position, namely, that without a knowledge of the law we can have no just sentiments; I proceed to shew, in the second place,

That neither can we have any *proper feelings*. Of course, I must make the same limitation as before, and be understood as speaking only of feelings so far as religion is concerned.

Without the knowledge of the law there can be no true *humility*. This is a matter of vast importance.—What is humility? It is not a mere sense of our weakness as creatures, nor a general acknowledgment that we are sinners; but a deep and abiding consciousness of our guilty and undone state; a consciousness, that darkness itself is not more opposite to light, than we are to the pure and holy law of God. It is a sense of our utter alienation from God, yea, and of enmity against him; insomuch, that “every imagination of the thoughts of our heart is

only evil continually :” it is such a sense of this as makes us really to “ lothe and abhor ourselves, and to repent before God in dust and ashes.” This is that “ broken and contrite heart which God will not despise.” But where do we find persons penetrated with this contrition, and smiting on their breasts, and crying for mercy as sinners deserving of God’s wrath and indignation ? Or, if we saw one under such distressing apprehensions, who amongst us would not be ready to think that he carried matters to excess ; and that, unless he had been guilty of some sins beyond what were commonly committed, he had no need for such excessive griefs and sorrows ? It is well known that such penitents are few ; and that such comforters, if indeed disgust did not preclude any attempt to administer comfort, would be found in every company we meet with. But to what is all this owing ? It arises from men’s ignorance of the law : they try not either themselves or others by so high a standard : and, being insensible of their departures from it, they see no cause for such humiliation on account of those departures. In fact, the very idea of such humility enters not into the mind of the natural man : and, copious as were the languages of Greece and Rome, they had no word whereby to express it. With the word which they used to express their idea of humility, they associated rather the notion of meanness, than of an exalted virtue : and, though all of us profess to admire humility as a grace, there is not in the universe a man, in his natural state, that either possesses or approves of it, according to its real import.

The same may be said of *gratitude*.—What is gratitude, but a thankful sense of mercies received ? A truly enlightened Christian will view himself as a poor bond-slave redeemed from sin and Satan, death and hell ; redeemed, too, by the precious blood of our incarnate God. He will be altogether, in his own apprehension, “ a brand plucked out of the burning :” an apostate fiend would not, in his estimation, be a greater monument of grace than he. Hence he

blesSES his redeeming God, and calls upon all that is within him to bless his holy name. But where do we find this transport? Where do we see persons oppressed under the weight of the obligations conferred upon them? Were we to behold a person so elevated with joy, or so depressed with a sense of his great unworthiness, the generality amongst us would call it extravagance, and perhaps ridicule it as the height of absurdity. To the generality, some faint acknowledgments are quite sufficient to express their sense of redeeming love. But how different is this from the feelings of those around the throne of God! *They*, angels as well as saints, are penetrated with the devoutest admiration of this stupendous mystery: the one, as viewing its transcendent excellency; the other, as themselves experiencing its richest benefits. *They* are all prostrating themselves before the throne of God. And wherefore is it that *men* are so cold and insensible? Is it not because they see not the depths from which they have been redeemed? Did they see in the glass of God's law the depth of the misery from which they have been delivered, they would have far other thoughts of their Deliverer. But, having reduced to almost nothing their obligations to him, no wonder if their gratitude to him be proportionably weak and vapid.

Of holy *zeal*, also, I must say the same. Who feels it in any measure corresponding with what the Scriptures require at our hands? We are represented as being "bought with a price;" and therefore are called to "glorify God with our body and our spirit, which are God's." To a man sensible of his obligations, no service under heaven would appear too great. All that he can do for the Lord is nothing in his eyes: and all that he can suffer for the Lord is accounted light. His time, his talents, his property, his influence, his whole life, appear of no value, but as they may be made subservient to the advancement of the Divine glory. But how little of this is seen! and how little is it approved, when seen! What names are too harsh, whereby to stigmatize such a life as this? and

how infinitely below this is the standard of those who value themselves upon their morality! To the same cause must this also be traced. In fact, humility, and gratitude, and zeal, must of necessity rise and fall together: and according as our views of the law are deep or superficial, will all of these evince themselves to accord or disagree with the standard proposed to us in the Gospel of Christ.

I come now, in the third place, to shew, that without the knowledge of the law we can have *no scriptural hopes*. The *faith* which alone justifies the soul, is that which brings us simply to the Lord Jesus Christ as our only hope and refuge. If we attempt, in any measure or degree, to blend with his merits any thing of our own, we make void all that he has done and suffered for us: "Christ himself is from that moment become of no effect unto us." As far as respects us, "his death is in vain." But who will exercise this faith? Who will condescend to accept salvation on such terms? Who will bear to renounce his good works in point of dependence on them, and to enter into heaven at the same gate with publicans and harlots? All this is too humiliating for our proud hearts: we will not endure it: we will have something of our own, whereof to boast. If we make not our own works the sole ground of our justification, we will rely on them in part: or, if we be brought to rely solely on the merits of Christ, and to seek salvation by faith alone, we will make our own goodness a warrant for believing in him. We cannot, we will not, suffer ourselves to be stript of all self-preference: we will not glory solely in the cross of Christ. And wherefore is all this reluctance to comply with the terms of the Gospel? It proceeds from our ignorance of the law. We see not, that our very best deeds stand in need of mercy, as much as our vilest sins. We see not, that the smallest defect entails a curse upon us, as truly as our most enormous transgression. When these things are clearly seen, all the difficulty vanishes; and we are contented to be saved altogether by grace. But, till we have

obtained this knowledge of the law, nothing under heaven can prevail upon us to exercise faith with becoming simplicity.

As to *an entire devotedness of heart to God*, as his redeemed people, we shall be equally defective in that also. We shall be contented with a low standard of obedience, and never aspire after a perfect conformity to the Divine image. To “walk altogether as Christ walked,” will appear a bondage. To tread in the steps of the holy Apostles, will be regarded as being “righteous over-much.” To glory in the cross for Christ’s sake, and to “rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame” and death for him, will be thought fit only for Apostles, and a culpable excess in us. *But nothing less than this will prove us sincere : nothing less than this will be an acceptable sacrifice unto the Lord.* If we would be really Christ’s, we must “live, not unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us, and rose again ;” “purifying ourselves, even as he is pure ;” and being “perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.” This, let it be remembered, is inseparable from a scriptural hope : and, inasmuch as nothing but a scriptural hope can constrain us to it, and nothing but the grace of Christ effect it in us, we must remain destitute of it : our ignorance of the law will keep us from Christ ; and our want of union with Christ will keep us far lower in our attainments than the Gospel requires, and, consequently, destitute of the hope which the Gospel only can inspire.

I think enough has now been spoken to shew the importance of the inquiry in my text. I am sensible that many strong things have been spoken ; and spoken, it may be thought, without sufficient proof : and I candidly acknowledge, that if I had not, in prospect, further opportunities of unfolding the subject, I would gladly have lowered, as far as Christian fidelity would have admitted of it, my statement. But my desire is, to impress your minds with the importance of the subject. I wish, if it may please God, to prepare the way for a careful and impartial

investigation of it. I certainly do feel that it is not sufficiently considered by Christians in general; and that, in comparison of other subjects, it is very rarely discussed. And most assuredly do I know, that an ignorance of it is at the root of all those superficial views and statements, with which the Christian world rests satisfied. O, that it might please God to accompany our investigation of it with his Holy Spirit, and to bring home the subject with power to all our hearts! Certainly, if the representation which I have given of it be true, a more important subject cannot occupy our attention. And there is need of much candour in the consideration of it. I wish it to be weighed: I know, that, if not founded in truth, and supported by clear convincing argument, it can have no weight with the audience which I have the honour to address. But I know, at the same time, that if, in some respects, it appear strange, it will not therefore be discarded as unworthy of attention. From the experience of many years do I know, that statements proposed with modesty are in this place heard with candour: and God forbid that I should affect to dogmatize, where it becomes me to speak with deference and humility! Yet I cannot dissemble, that my whole soul goes along with the subject; because I believe that the salvation of all your souls depends upon your acceptance or rejection of the truths essentially connected with it. Let me desire, therefore, that all amongst you, who know what it is to have access to God in prayer, will aid me with their supplications for an out-pouring of his Holy Spirit upon us in all our future discussions. It is but a little time that I have to speak for the Lord, or you to hear. O, that all of us may so improve the present hour, that, in that great day, when we shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, we may be accepted of our God; and that I who speak, and you who hear, may rejoice together!

MMLXIV.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE LAW.

Gal. iii. 19. *Wherefore then serveth the law?*

WE now enter upon the second part of our subject. We proposed to inquire into the use of the law. But, without entering distinctly into that point, we endeavoured to call your attention to it by an exposition of its vast importance. We were aware that we should anticipate much which would afterwards be brought forward; and that we should assume, for the present, *some things*, which, though *partially proved*, would remain to be afterwards more fully established. Yet we would hope that nothing was adduced without *sufficient* proof; and nothing asserted, which those who are at all acquainted with the subject would not readily concede. We think it highly probable, that in our subsequent discussions there may also be somewhat of repetition. If we were content to prosecute all the separate parts of the subject without pointing out their bearing upon the heart and conscience, we might easily keep them all distinct, without anticipating any thing, or repeating any thing. But you would, of course, wish me to discharge my high office with a due attention to your eternal interests: and, consequently, you will be prepared to allow me the liberty which is necessary to the attainment of this great object. Of course, I shall not trespass more in this respect than necessity shall require: but, if I be found to need your indulgence in this matter, you are now apprised of the reason of it, and will no doubt readily grant to me the liberty I request.

I am now about to answer the inquiry which I have instituted, and the importance of which I have already shewn. But, previous to my entering upon the distinct answer, there is one point which must, of necessity, be settled. You will ask me, ‘Of what law are you speaking? Let me understand *that* first; for, otherwise, all that you shall speak about

its use will be in vain !' I am aware that this must be first clearly and distinctly stated. I was constrained, in my former discourse, to pass over this point ; and to *assume*, that the Apostle was speaking of the *moral* law. But now, as I then gave you reason to expect, I will address myself to that consideration ; and will shew,

First, what is that law which the Apostle spake of : and, secondly, what bearing this part of my subject has upon the question before us.

First, what is that law which the Apostle spake of, and respecting which he instituted his inquiry ?

The word " Law," in the New Testament, is used in several different senses. But as in this place it can mean only the law as given to Moses, it must, of necessity, mean the moral, or the ceremonial, or the judicial law ; or a compound of them all together. But of the judicial law the Apostle makes no question. He is speaking of a law which appeared to stand in competition with the promise which had been made to Abraham four hundred and thirty years before. But between the promise and the judicial law, which I may call the common law of the land, there could be no such competition : for the promise made to Abraham will be equally in force in every country under heaven, whatever be its code of laws, or the outward form of its administration. Of the ceremonial law he does speak ; and *that* frequently : because it was to *that* that the Jews adhered with such inveterate pertinacity. But still, if we admit that to be included in the passage, it is only included as being that outward form which the Jews supposed to be inseparable from the moral law ; and the performance of which they regarded as an obedience to the moral law. It is of the moral law chiefly, if not exclusively, that the Apostle speaks. The line of his argument is this : God promised to Abraham and his seed, life, by faith in the Messiah, who should spring from his loins. Four hundred and thirty years afterwards he gave to Moses a law of *works*, which

were partly moral, and partly ceremonial. It may be asked, then; In publishing this law, did God intend to set aside the promise? No: he did not; and he could not: he could not, because the promise made to Abraham was made to him and to his believing seed, whether of Jews or Gentiles, to the end of the world: but the law given to Moses was given only to a small portion of Abraham's seed; and *that* only for a time: and, consequently, as no covenant can be annulled but by the consent of both the parties interested in it, and only one of those parties was present at the transaction on Mount Sinai, nothing that was done there could supersede what had been done with others four hundred and thirty years before. Then, it would be asked, 'For what end was this law given?' The Apostle answers, "It was given because of transgressions, till the seed should come, to whom the promise was made;" that is, it was given to shew to what an extent transgression had abounded; and how greatly they needed the Promised Seed, to recommend them to God. Instead of setting aside the promises, then, as a person unacquainted with its uses might be ready to suppose, it was intended rather to be subservient to them; by shewing to men, that, being condemned by the law, they must seek for life as a free gift of God, through faith in the Promised Seed.

Let it then be observed, that, if we admit the ceremonial law to be *in part* intended, it is *only in part*: it is only as shewing that works of every kind, whether ceremonial or moral, are equally excluded from the office of justifying the soul before God. This is the whole scope of the Apostle's argument, whether in the Epistle to the Galatians, or in that to the Romans: and to say, that, though ceremonial works cannot justify us, moral works may, is to oppose the whole line of his argument throughout both the epistles, and to set it aside altogether. The great question in both is, Whether we are to be justified by works or by faith? And his whole argument, in both, goes to prove this one point, that

“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth^a!”

Further proofs of this point will be adduced in their proper place. What I have here stated is quite sufficient to establish the point proposed; namely, that the moral law is that chiefly respecting which the Apostle’s inquiry is instituted.

Now, then, let me say what I mean by the moral law. It is that law which was given to Moses on Mount Sinai, and was “ordained by angels in the hand of a Mediator.” It was the law of the ten commandments only that God wrote on tables of stone, or that was given to Moses at that time amidst the ministration of angels^b. All the ceremonial law was revealed to Moses afterwards, and in private, without any of the attendant pomp with which the moral law was given.

But what was this law? and in what light was it to be considered? It was the very law which was originally written upon the heart of man in Paradise; and which, having been effaced in a great measure by the fall, and altogether obliterated from the minds of men through forgetfulness, and the love of sin, needed now to be republished; in order that men might know how transgression had abounded; and how greatly they stood in need of that Promised Seed, whom God had before taught them to expect, and “in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed.” It was intended to shew them on what terms life had been originally promised to man in Paradise; and on what terms alone it could give life to man. But, inasmuch as all had transgressed it, none could obtain life by it now; but all must seek for life in the way which God had provided, even by faith in the Promised Seed; to which way of salvation the law was now intended to shut them up.

Now, then, we come to shew the true nature of this law. We have shewn, that it is of the moral law that we are speaking: and to *that* we are more

^a Rom. x. 4.

^b Compare Acts vii, 53. with Deut. v. 22.

especially also directed in the words of my text. The Apostle says in my text, "We know that the law is spiritual." Now, that is not true respecting either the judicial or ceremonial law: not of the *judicial*; for that was only a code of laws for the regulation of the state, just like any other code of laws that exists in any other state: nor of the *ceremonial*; for that the Apostle expressly calls, "a law of a *carnal* commandment:" and he represents it as consisting altogether of "*carnal* ordinances^c." We are arrived, therefore, at the point where we desired to come; namely, to shew THE SPIRITUALITY OF THIS LAW: and this we will shew by an examination of it in all its parts.

The law, if we merely attend to the words in which it was promulgated, seems to refer only to external acts, whereas, in reality, it was intended to bind us to the performance of every thing connected with those acts, either in word or thought; and to prohibit every thing which could in any way, even by inclination or desire, prove an incentive to transgression. The duties of the first table did not merely forbid outward idolatry, such as the serving of gods of wood and stone; but the inward respect of the soul, as paid to any creature in comparison of the Creator. Nothing, either within us or without us, is to stand in competition with him. Nothing is to be made, in any respect or any degree, an object of our affiance. Our own wisdom, strength, righteousness, must be altogether renounced as objects of dependence; and God alone be acknowledged as the source of all good. So neither must we seek our happiness in any creature, except in entire subseriency to him. For though "he has given us all things richly to enjoy," our enjoyment must be, not so much of the creature itself, as of God in it; that God may be to us our "all in all." The reverence of his great name, and the observance of his Sabbaths, come in as component parts of the regard we are to shew towards him. They must not be limited to

^c Heb. vii. 16. and ix. 10.

words or acts, but must extend to the entire habit of our souls : for, as I have said, the prohibition includes an injunction of all that is contrary to the thing prohibited. We must not only have no other gods besides him, but must love him with all the heart, and all the mind, and all the soul, and all the strength : and this frame of mind must pervade our every action, every word, every thought : and, inasmuch as every seventh day is set apart for him, the body, as well as the soul, must on that day be devoted to his service, not only according to the measure prescribed for other days, but exclusively, even as the soul itself.

If we come to the duties of the second table, we shall find them of equal extent, whether as commanding what is good, or as prohibiting what is evil. The fifth command enjoins all that can attach to us, as superiors, equals, or inferiors : it seems, indeed, to comprehend only one relation, and that of the inferior only : but it extends to every relation in which man can stand to his fellow-man ; and to every possible expression of mutual love.

The sixth and seventh commandments seem extremely limited ; but we are warranted to affirm that they extend as much to the dispositions of the soul as to the actions of the body. Our blessed Lord has explained them to us in his Sermon on the Mount. The Scribes and Pharisees had narrowed their import, and reduced them to mere bodily acts. But our Lord and Saviour shewed, that an angry thought was a transgression of the one, and an impure look a violation of the other. Exceeding thankful should we be for this infallible exposition of their meaning : for this throws the true light upon the whole ; and serves as a clew, whereby to find our way through every commandment of the decalogue. If the letter of them only were to be taken, the great mass of us, I would hope, might congratulate ourselves as innocent in relation to them : but if an angry word, even to the saying to a brother, ‘Raca,’ subjects us to the danger of hell-fire ; and an impure

look, even the looking on a woman to lust after her, is a commission of adultery with her in the heart ; who has not need to humble himself before God, and to tremble for the judgment that awaits him ?

The eighth and ninth commandments must be understood as reaching, in like manner, to every injury that may be done to our neighbour's property or reputation ; and to every act, or word, or thought, whereby either the one or the other may be endangered.

But the key to the whole is the tenth commandment. That, even in words, goes beyond the mere act, and prohibits the disposition of the mind. It was this which opened the eyes of the Apostle Paul, in reference to his state before God. Having been educated a Pharisee, he rested in the exposition which the Pharisees were wont to give of the commandments ; and knowing that, according to their literal import, he was innocent, he thought himself, as "touching the righteousness of the law, blameless." But, when he came to consider more attentively the tenth commandment, he knew not how to withstand it, or to justify himself any longer as one who had truly observed it. He perceived that an inordinate desire of any kind was an actual violation of it ; and he was conscious, that though he had withstood any unlawful desires, he had not been free from the motions of them in his heart. Hence he was constrained to acknowledge, that he had transgressed the law, and was consequently condemned by it ; and needed to cry to God for mercy, as much as the vilest sinner upon earth. Hear his own account of this matter : "I was alive without the law once ; but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died : and the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death^d." The law, as given to man in Paradise, was ordained to life ; but as continued to man in his fallen state, it is invariably unto death ; and every man upon the face of the whole earth is condemned by it.

^d Rom. vii. 9, 10.

Thus I have, as briefly as possible, marked the spirituality of the law: and sure I am, that all who consider it aright must subscribe to that saying of the Psalmist, "I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad," far beyond the reach or comprehension of any finite intelligence^e.

Now, at the hazard of anticipating some future remarks, I propose to shew,

Secondly, What bearing this part of our subject has on the great question before us.

It will be remembered what that question is; namely, What are the uses of the moral law? And had I been content with amplifying my foregoing observations, I should have been under no necessity to trespass at all on the ground which we shall hereafter occupy. But it is not to the understanding alone that I would speak, but to the heart and conscience; humbly imploring of God to clothe his word with power, and to make it the means of everlasting salvation to every soul that hears it.

Now, who that has attended to the foregoing statement does not see, in the first place, *What abundant grounds the best amongst us have for deep humiliation before God.*

I will readily admit, that, as to gross outward violations of this law, many amongst us may be blameless. But who amongst us has rendered unto God the honour due unto his name; loving him, serving him, glorifying him, as it became us? Who has despised every thing in comparison of him, and walked as in his immediate presence; reverencing every thing in proportion as it appeared to proceed from him, or to lead to him; and wholly devoting to him the Sabbath-day; and having, on that sacred day especially, the entire rest of his soul in him, as an earnest and foretaste of the eternal Sabbath? Who amongst us will venture to say, that he has so lived, not unto himself, but unto his God; doing *his* will on earth as

^e Ps. cxix. 96.

it is done in heaven ? Nay, who has come near this standard ? Who has ever come up to it for so much as one day in his whole life ? Again, if we look at the duties of the second table, wherein men are particularly ready to vaunt themselves as innocent, where is there one who has fulfilled all that is required of him, as a husband or wife, as a parent or child, as a master or servant, as a magistrate or subject ? Were we to trace the line that is required in all the different relations, and compare our conduct with it, who must not acknowledge that his transgressions have been multiplied, even as the hairs of his head, and as the sands upon the sea-shore ? If we come to the tempers and dispositions that we have exercised, and to the thoughts that we have harboured, and consider the interpretation which our Lord himself has put upon them, who amongst us must not blush to lift up his eyes unto heaven, and be ashamed and confounded in the presence of that God who searcheth the heart ? We are not sufficiently observant of the desires which break not forth into outward acts : but God notes them all, and imputes them to us as transgressions of his holy law. But, in truth, if we look at our words and actions, we shall not find ourselves so blameless as we are ready to imagine. For, where our own interest has stood in competition with our neighbour's, who has not felt a leaning to *self* ? Who has, in all things, viewed his neighbour's claims with the same impartiality that he would a competition between others, in which he had no interest ? And, in speaking of our neighbour, especially if he have shewn himself adverse to us, who will venture to say that he has at all times evinced the same candour and charity as, in a change of circumstances, he should have judged due to him ? We may not be conscious of having been under an undue influence in these matters : but, when we see how all are affected around us, we may be sure that we have felt the general contagion, and been but too deeply imbued with the spirit of infirmity that pervades our fallen nature. And what

shall we say to the last command? If even the Apostle Paul was slain by that, who shall stand before it? Who must not acknowledge, that, times without number, he has been under the influence of irregular and inordinate desires? and who, under a sense of his guilt, must not put his hand on his mouth, and his mouth in the dust, crying, "Unclean, unclean^f?"

Perhaps you will think that I have borne somewhat hard upon your consciences; and availed myself of the spirituality of the law to inflict, unnecessarily, a wound upon your minds. But the truth is, that I have spoken nothing yet in comparison of what I ought to speak, in order to do justice to my subject. Forgive me, then, if I proceed to put this matter in its true point of view.

To call to mind what we have done, or what we have left undone, will give us a very inadequate view of our sinfulness. If we would estimate ourselves aright, we must take the high standard of God's holy law, and see how infinitely short of our duty we have come, in every act of our lives, and in every moment of our existence. We must not inquire merely, whether we have loved God at all; but how near we have come to what his law requires, and his perfections demand. We must trace the whole state of our souls from the beginning, and estimate it by this rule. We shall then see that our attainments have been *as nothing*, in comparison of our shortcomings and defects; literally, I say, *as nothing*. The poorest bankrupt that ever existed has paid as great a proportion of his debt as we have of our debt to God: yea, he is in a far higher state than we: for he, if he discharge nothing of his debt, adds nothing to it; but we have been augmenting our debt every day, every hour, every moment. The very best deeds of the best of men, whilst in their unconverted state, if weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, have been lighter than vanity; and if tried by the touch-

^f Lev. xiii. 45. Lam. iii. 29.

stone of God's perfect law, have been no better than *splendid sins* ; or, rather, they have been one continued accumulation of guilt and misery against the day of wrath. If we try ourselves only by the *letter* of the law, we shall see nothing of this : but if we enter into the *spirit* of it, and examine ourselves by that, there will be no terms too humiliating for us whereby to express our sinfulness and our desert of God's wrath and indignation.

Permit me, then, to call you to this self-abasing state. Permit me to wrest out of your hands that delusive plea, that you have done no harm. I pray you to take judgment as your line, and righteousness as your plummet, and to judge of yourselves as God judgeth. It is by his judgment, and not by your own, that you must stand or fall : and his judgment will be according to truth.

Were the condemnation that awaits men to affect only this present life, we might be contented to leave them under their delusions. But we must shortly appear before the heart-searching God, to receive our final doom. Then the book of his remembrance, wherein all our actions, words, and thoughts, were written, will be opened ; then will our own consciences also attest the truth of every accusation that shall be brought against us ; and then, above all, shall we see the equity, both of the test whereby we shall be tried, and of the sentence that shall be pronounced against us. And then there will be no respect of persons with God. The learned and the dignified will stand on the same footing with the most illiterate peasant ; or rather, will have a severer judgment, in proportion to the advantages which they have neglected to improve. The Lord grant that these considerations may be duly laid to heart ; and that all of us, while yet the opportunity is afforded, may abase ourselves before God, with all humility of mind, and with that brokenness of heart which God will not despise !

I must not close this subject without observing, in the second place, *What a folly it is ever to think of*

establishing a righteousness of our own by the works of the law.

If God required only an observance of the letter of his law, then indeed we might entertain a hope of this kind. Yet even then, when we reflected on the tenth commandment, we should see how vain and hopeless would be the attempt. But when we see that there is not so much as one commandment, either of the first or second table, which we have not violated, it seems a perfect infatuation to stand on the ground of our own righteousness. Persons, I know, have an idea that Christ has lowered the terms of the law, and brought down its demands to the standard of human infirmity. But where can they find any thing that sanctions such an idea as this? Which of the commands has the Lord Jesus lowered? The whole decalogue he has summed up in two commands, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbour as thyself." Which of these two has he set aside? which has he dispensed with? or what measure of abatement has he made in either of them? If this law, before the coming of Christ, required too much, then was it not "holy, or just, or good:" if, on the contrary, it required only what was really due, then has Christ, if he has at all lowered its demands, robbed God of the obedience due to him, and become himself a minister and patron of sin.

I would speak with reverence on every subject wherein the Deity is concerned: but I must say, that God cannot reduce the demands of his own law: it would be to divest himself of his own glory, and to give liberty to man to violate the obligations which every rational creature must, of necessity, owe to his Creator. His law is as immutable as he himself is: it is a perfect transcript of his mind and will. With the exception of the Sabbath, which is a positive institution, and has no foundation but in the will of God, the law exists of necessity, and independent of any revelation of it whatever. It must, of necessity,

be the duty of a creature to love and serve his Creator; and to love, in subordination to him, all the works of his intelligent creation. I must say, then, that this law is unalterable; and that, if any would obtain righteousness by it, they must obey it perfectly, from first to last: and as this is impossible, since we all are transgressors of it, the thought of obtaining righteousness by the law must be relinquished by every soul of man. We must, if ever we would be saved at all, look out for some other righteousness more commensurate with the demands of the law, and more consistent with the honour of the Lawgiver.

But here I must stop, because this would lead me to what must occupy a separate discourse. I conclude, therefore, with commending these thoughts to your attentive consideration; and with entreating, that you would seek to make yourselves acquainted with this all-important subject. The Apostle says, “*We know* that the law is spiritual:” would to God that all of us could say the same! But, indeed, it is not generally “*known*.” On the contrary, a very general and lamentable ignorance of it prevails in the Christian world. Every one is desirous of moderating the demands of the law to his own standard. Every one is desirous of lessening his own criminality before God: and, to effect this, he lowers the standard whereby to try his obedience. But I pray you to settle it in your minds, as an indisputable fact, that the law is, and ever must remain, spiritual. Unless this be thoroughly understood, it will be impossible for you to go along with me in my future discourses: for how can you comprehend the uses of the law, if you know not what the law itself is? Indeed, if you get not a clear insight into this as the first step, I shall appear to you to be bringing forward things strange and unwarrantable. But let the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians be attentively read with this particular view; and I dare affirm, that the spirituality of the law will be found written in them as with a sun-beam: and, *that* once seen, you will be

prepared to understand the uses of the law, as they shall be more fully developed in my future discourses. You will not then be ready to exclaim, as otherwise you possibly may, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" You will see that our future statements necessarily grow out of this: and you will find no difficulty in adopting that sentiment, which is the ultimate drift of my whole argument, namely, that if ever you be saved at all, you must renounce all dependence on your own righteousness, and must possess a righteousness corresponding with the utmost demands of the law, even that righteousness which the Lord Jesus Christ wrought out by his own obedience unto death, and which he confers on all his penitent and believing people.

MMLXV.

THE FIRST USE OF THE LAW.

Gal. iii. 19. *Wherefore then serveth the law?*

NOW we begin to enter fully on our subject. Not that we could have omitted our last statement: for it was necessary that the spirituality of the law should be fully known; since, without the knowledge of that, it is impossible for any man to understand the truths that are founded on it. But, having thus prepared the way, we may now state what we conceive to be the chief uses of the law; namely,

1. As a monitor, to guard us against adhering to the first covenant.

2. As an instructor, to guide us to a better covenant.

3. As a rule to govern us, when we have laid hold on that better covenant.

These three uses will form the subject of our present and two future Discourses.

At this time, I am to shew, that the law is intended as a monitor, to guard us against adhering to the former covenant.

The law was originally given to man in Paradise, as a covenant between God and him. It was not, indeed, written in a book ; but it was written on his heart. The terms of it were, that man was to obey whatever God should command ; and then both he and his posterity should live. But if he transgressed in any particular, he and all his posterity should die. This, indeed, is but obscurely intimated in the history of man's creation. It was there said to him, " In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." It is, however, most fully opened in the New Testament. There it is said, " By one man's disobedience many were made sinners : " and again, " By the offence of one, many died ; and judgment came upon all men to condemnation." Now it is a plain indisputable fact, that death came upon all men from the very moment that Adam sinned : it has come, not on those only who have sinned like him, but on millions who never have committed actual sin ; whose sufferings, therefore, must have been the punishment of *his* transgression. If sin had not been imputed to infants, they could never have been called to bear the penalty of sin. But they do pay that penalty even from the womb ; and therefore it is manifest that they are considered as having fallen in Adam, and as being in some way chargeable with his transgression. That is the covenant, under which every child of man is born into the world. The terms of the covenant having been forgotten, God was pleased to publish it by Moses, and with his own hand to write it upon tables of stone. The obligations of it were stated in the Ten Commandments : and the sanctions of it were added, " Do this, and live : Transgress, and die."

It is true, that to Israel in the Wilderness it was published in somewhat of a mitigated form : because it was introduced by that gracious declaration, " I am the Lord thy God." But still the terrors, with which the publication of it was accompanied, shewed, that it was " a fiery law," " a ministration of death," " a ministration of condemnation." It is from St. Paul's

reasonings chiefly, that we gain a clear insight into it. Though published in the form of a covenant, it is not really intended to be a covenant of life to man, *now in his fallen state*: it is intended only to shew him what this covenant is which he is under, and how impossible it is for him to obtain salvation by it. This will appear clearly, if we attend to its requirements and its sanctions, as they are expressed in my text: "Do this," is the command given: Do it all; *all* without exception: *continue* to do it from first to last. On these terms you shall live. But a curse awaits you, even an everlasting curse, if you violate it in any one particular. Plead what you will, its denunciations are inflexible, irreversible. 'I wish to obey it.' 'Tell me not of your *wishes*; but *do* it.'—'I have endeavoured to obey it.' 'Tell me not of your *endeavours*: but *do* it; or else you are cursed.'—'I have done it in almost every particular.' 'Tell me not of what you have done *almost*: have you obeyed it *altogether*? have you obeyed it in *all* things? If not, you are cursed.'—'I have for a great number of years obeyed it; and but once only, through inadvertence, transgressed it.' 'Then you are cursed. If you have offended in one point, you are, as St. James informs you, guilty of all^a. If you have not continued to obey it from the first moment of your existence to the last, you are cursed.'—'But I am sorry for my transgression.' 'I know nothing of your sorrows: you are cursed.'—'But I will reform; and never transgress again.' 'I know nothing of your reformation: you are cursed.'—'But I will obey it perfectly in future.' 'I know nothing of what you may do in future: you are cursed. I cannot alter my terms for any one. My declaration to all, without exception, is, "*Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them.*" If you have risen to these terms, I will give you life: if you have fallen short of them, in any one particular, nothing remains for

^a Jam. ii. 10.

you but “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”^b

This, let it be observed, is no inference of mine; but the deduction of the Apostle Paul: for he says, “As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse.” And on what does he ground this sweeping sentence of condemnation? He grounds it on the declaration of the law itself: “As many as, &c. &c. *For it is written*, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them.” There is no human being that ever has obeyed the law thus perfectly: and therefore all, without exception, are obnoxious to the curse; and all, who are yet looking to the law for justification, are actually “under the curse;” and must, if they die in their present state, endure it for evermore.

Such, then, are the terms of the covenant, even of that covenant under which we all are born.

Now let us see how the law, as a monitor, guards us against adhering to this covenant.

It opens to us what that obedience is which the covenant requires. It shews us it, indeed, chiefly in prohibitions, and in prohibitions of gross overt acts: and, if it included no more than these acts, it would rather encourage us to cleave to that covenant, and to hope for salvation by it. But, as I shewed in my last, it comprehends in its requirements perfect love to God in its utmost possible extent, and perfect love to man, even such as a man bears to himself: and it charges us with guilt, not merely on account of open violations of its commands, but on account of the defectiveness of our best actions.—I will suppose, at this moment you are filled with love to God. ’Tis well: but does your love rise to the full extent that is due to him? I will take you at this, the best

^b The reason of this being written in *the form of a dialogue* is assigned in the next Discourse, p. 118 (Note). In Rom. x. 5—10, St. Paul, *writing on the same subject*, uses somewhat of the same form. The precise mode of *abrupt dialogue* is also used, at some length, in Rom. iii. 1—8.

moment that you ever lived : Are all the powers of your soul called forth in these acts, so that there is no more defect in you than in Adam before the fall ? If this be not the case, you are guilty ; and these your most exalted virtues, instead of being meritorious in the sight of God, stand in need of his pardon on account of their defects. The same must be said of the best *moment* that you ever passed in reference to your fellow-creatures : Did your actions carry with them the whole soul in love to God, and to man for God's sake ? And were they so perfect, that there was not in them the smallest blemish or defect ? If not, you stand in need of pardon for your defects ; and, consequently, can claim nothing on the score of merit.' Now, if the law is so rigorous in its demands as this, and admits of no deviation, no weariness, no defect even for a moment, under any circumstances, to the very end of life, what must it, of necessity, be considered as saying unto us ? ' Think not of obtaining life by the covenant of works : you see its demands : you see how impossible it is that they should ever be relaxed : you see how inexorably it denounces its curse against the least transgression : you see, it makes no abatement on account of your weakness : it offers no assistance for the performance of any one duty : it knows nothing of repentance or reformation : it exacts perfect obedience from first to last : and *that* not paid, even though the failure be only once, and in the smallest point, it does nothing but denounce its curses against you. And will you seek life by such a covenant as this ? Oh ! flee from it ; and dread lest you continue under it one hour longer. The terrors of Mount Sinai did but faintly represent the fearfulness of your state. And the strict injunctions relative to the touching of the mount did but faintly mark the impossibility of your ever gaining access to God by that covenant : and, verily, if Moses himself said on that occasion, " I exceedingly fear and quake," much more may you in the contemplation of the danger to which you are exposed, and of the judgments that await you.'

I am aware that this counsel of the law appears harsh. But it is not really so : nay, it is *a statement in which the Israelites of old were expected cordially to acquiesce*. The very passage which, with some slight alterations, the Apostle quotes in Gal. iii. 10, are contained in the words which the Levites, as God's representatives, were to deliver to all the people of Israel from Mount Ebal : " Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law, to do them : AND ALL THE MEN SHALL SAY, AMEN^c." Let me hope, therefore, that, instead of exclaiming, ' God forbid ! ' as some perhaps would ignorantly be disposed to do, in reply to the statement before given, there shall be but one sentiment pervading this whole assembly ; and that all, in a way of cordial approbation, as well as in a way of intellectual acknowledgment, shall with one voice cry, ' AMEN, AMEN.'

Now, the Scripture bears ample testimony that this is indeed the first use of the law. " It was not possible that a law should be given to fallen man whereby he should have life : if it had, verily," says the Apostle, " righteousness should have been by the law^d." The law, therefore, must not be regarded as intended to give life : it was given to shew how sin abounded ; as St. Paul says, " The law entered, that the offence might abound^e ;" that is, might appear to abound. And again he says, " By the law is the knowledge of sin^f." And this view of the law will explain what he means, when he says, " I, through the law, am dead to the law^g." In fact, this *expression comprehends and illustrates this entire part of my subject*. The Apostle saw that the law did nothing but condemn him ; and therefore he renounced it utterly in point of dependence, and determined to seek salvation in some other way. And the same effect must the knowledge of the law produce on us ; it must destroy all our hope by the covenant of works ; and lead us to inquire after the way of salvation which God has provided for us in the Gospel of his Son.

^c Deut. xxvii. 26.

^d ver. 21.

^e Rom. v. 20.

^f Rom. iii. 20.

^g Gal. ii. 19.

Having pointed out this first use of the law, I now come to recommend it in that particular view, and for that express end.

It is well known that men have a great propensity to cleave to the law, and to seek salvation by it. This was the besetting sin of the Pharisees of old : “ they had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge ; for, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they would not submit to the righteousness of God^h. ” This was the fault also of the Judaizing teachers : they were always blending the law with the Gospel, as a joint ground of hope before God ; not being aware, that, if they relied upon the law at all, they must stand or fall by it altogether. The moment they did *any thing* with a view to obtain justification by it, they became “ debtors to do the whole lawⁱ ; ” and, not having discharged their whole debt to that, nothing awaited them but chains of darkness for evermore. The same propensity there is in us, though it is indulged by men in very different degrees. Some look for their justification altogether upon the footing of their good works : these know not for what end good works can be required at all, but with the view of our obtaining justification by them : and, when they are told that they can never be justified by their works, they suppose that we set aside the observance of good works altogether, and encourage all manner of licentiousness. Others see, that some honour is due to Christ ; and that if he came to save us, we must, in part at least, stand indebted to him for salvation. Hence they are willing to rely in part on his vicarious sacrifice, and in part on their own obedience to the law. They do not perceive that the one makes void the other ; and that salvation must be wholly of works or wholly of grace ; and therefore they unite the two as the foundation of their hope. But they see not that their foundation is only like the image of iron and clay in

^h Rom. x. 2, 3.

ⁱ Gal. v. 3.

Nebuchadnezzar's vision ; the parts of which could never cohere, nor form any permanent basis for the superincumbent weight. Others rather think to enter into a composition with the Lord, and agree to render him service, if he will impart to them salvation. Thus, though they do not expressly unite their merits with his, they make their obedience the ground on which they hope for an interest in him ; and, to a certain degree, a price, which they propose to pay for it. It never occurs to them, that they have nothing but sin and misery to present to him ; and that therefore their entire hope must be in his sovereign grace and mercy. They forget that they are to receive all "without money and without price." Others refine yet more ; and, conceiving themselves willing to give to the Lord Jesus all the glory of their salvation, they only look to themselves for their warrant *to believe* in him : either they dare not go to him, because they are so vile, and therefore they will endeavour to make themselves better, in order that they may venture into his presence, and indulge a hope of acceptance with him ; or, they have a good hope that he will apply to them all the benefits of his passion, because they have not transgressed beyond the common bounds of human frailty. But the plain answer to all these delusions is this : Salvation must be wholly of works, or wholly of grace : as the Apostle has said, "If it be of grace, then is it no more of works ; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace ; otherwise work is no more work^k." You perceive, therefore, that you must not attempt to blend the two covenants in any respect : if you cleave in any degree to the covenant of works, you can have nothing to do with the covenant of grace : if you come not solely, and with your whole hearts, to the Lord Jesus Christ, to be saved by his blood and righteousness, laying aside and renouncing every other hope, you must go back to the covenant of works, and seek for acceptance through it. But do you not hear the law ? Do

^k Rom. xi. 6.

you not hear how inflexible it is in its demands, and how inexorable in its denunciations? Alter it you cannot, in any respect; obey it you must, if you will still found your hopes on it in any measure or degree: and therefore it is your wisdom to adopt the determination of St. Paul, and to seek henceforth to “be found in Christ; not having your own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ¹.”

What now becomes us in this view of the law? what, indeed, but humiliation and contrition in the deepest degree? We must see how many curses hang over our devoted heads. We must not merely look at our grosser violations of the law, but at our defects: for “the wrath of God is revealed against *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;” and every transgression, whether by commission or omission, whether by excess or defect, will receive its just recompence of reward. Let it be granted, then, that our lives have been blameless, as far as respects outward sin: still, if we judge ourselves by the perfect law of God, our sins will be found more than can be numbered, and greater than can be conceived. When we compare ourselves with some of our fellow-creatures, who trample under foot all the laws of God and man, we appear to be very worthy characters: and such we are in the sight of man; but in the sight of God there is by no means so great a difference between us as we are apt to imagine. In estimating our character, and weighing our comparative worth, God may see less indeed of gross iniquity, but a far more abundant measure of spiritual sins, which are not a whit less hateful in his eyes. Suppose it all true which the self-applauding Pharisee affirmed, that he had been no extortioner, not unjust, and no adulterer; did he not make ample compensation for this, by his pride, his self-complacency, his uncharitableness? Yes, in truth; these weighed as much in the scales of heaven, as the grosser evils from which he was exempt. Had he tried himself by a just standard,

¹ Phil. iii. 9.

he would have found but little reason for his self-preference and self-applause: he would have seen that his boasted righteousness was as defective as that of the poor Publican: and the only difference between the two, supposing the one to have been as good as he imagined, and the other as evil as was supposed, was, that the one was a painted sepulchre, and the other a sepulchre without paint. I must not, indeed, be understood to say, that gross carnal sins do not add to the criminality of the person in whom they are found; but only, that, supposing one person to abound more in carnal filthiness, and another in spiritual, the latter, to say the least, has as little reason to glory in himself, or to trust in his own righteousness, as the former. The point to which we must all look for real humiliation is, the defectiveness of our obedience. Let this be seen, and seen too in all its aggravated character, as against a God of infinite love and mercy; against a Saviour who has assumed our nature, and laid down his life for us; against the Holy Spirit, who, by his gracious influences, has striven with us all our days, to guide us aright, and to bring us to repentance: let it be seen, also, as against light and knowledge, against vows and resolutions, against judgments and mercies; and, further, as continued in, for years, without any shame or remorse: let our impenitence also be marked, and our proud rejection of God's proffered mercy in Christ Jesus: let all this be viewed; and we shall see little reason to value ourselves on not having committed some of the grossest sins: we shall see that our iniquities have grown up unto heaven; and that they must sink us into everlasting perdition, if God do not, in the multitude of his tender mercies, interpose for our deliverance, and make "his grace to superabound, where our sins have so greatly abounded." We shall see, that to call ourselves the chief of sinners, is not merely a kind of modest and becoming saying, which, whilst it sounds well from the lips, needs not be felt in the heart; but that it is a character which belongs to the very best amongst us; since

the best man in the universe knows more evil in himself than he can know of others, except where the evils have been made notorious by overt acts. If the law be properly used, the person who thus tries himself by it will see himself exposed to God's heaviest judgments, no less than the most flagrant transgressor in the world: and he will cry for mercy, precisely in the same manner as Peter did, when sinking in the waves, "Save, Lord, or I perish!" Others, who have not such views of the law, will wonder at him, and say, 'What can *you* have done, to call for such remorse and fear?' But he knows his own desert before God, and will therefore lie low before him, in the deepest self-abasement.

This, then, is what I would wish you to do: it is for this end that I bring the subject before you: it is for this end that I hold up thus the glass of the law before your eyes, that you may know your true character before God. I would not that it should be said of us, as of the Jews of old, that "we seek righteousness, and cannot attain to it, because we seek it not by faith, but, as it were, by the works of the law^m." I would that it should be a settled principle in all our minds, that "by the works of the law shall no flesh living be justifiedⁿ." O, if we could but listen to this monitor! If the warnings which he gives us be alarming, they still are salutary: and it were surely better be warned that our house is built on sand, than that we should be left to perish under its ruins. And were a person who perceived our danger to withhold the warning, he would be justly considered by all as accessory to our destruction.

I am aware that there has been an aspect of severity about this part of my subject; of severity, which I would gladly have avoided, if it had been compatible with that fidelity which became me. But I speak to an audience who can distinguish between the harsh anathemas of man, and the authoritative declarations of Almighty God. If, indeed, I have put

^m Rom. ix. 31, 32.

ⁿ Rom. iii. 20.

a harsher sense upon God's word than it manifestly imports, I will be contented that all the blame, which such an inconsiderate proceeding would deserve, shall attach to me. But, if I have spoken only what God himself has authorized and enjoined, and what will assuredly be found true at the last, then let me hope, that the salutary warning will be kindly received; and that you will be the better prepared for our next subject, wherein a balm will be applied to every wound, and a refuge opened for every one that would flee from the wrath to come. To that I look forward, as to a subject far more congenial with my feelings than the terrors of the law. To bring forward the glad tidings of salvation, and to proclaim mercy through the sufferings of our incarnate God, is, I trust, the joy and delight of my soul. From the first moment that ever a dispensation was committed to me to preach the Gospel, "I have determined to know nothing in my ministrations but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." O that in my next I may be enabled to commend Him to you, as a suitable and all-sufficient Saviour! And if, through what has been already spoken, any of you be pricked in your hearts, and be stirred up to cry, "What shall we do to be saved?" may the answer, that shall be given you in my next, be accompanied with a blessing from on high, and prove "the power of God unto salvation to every one that hears it!"

° Rom. i. 16.

MMLXVI.

THE LAW, A SCHOOLMASTER, TO BRING US TO CHRIST.

Gal. iii. 19. *Wherefore then serveth the law?*

WE are now arrived at the second use of the law, which is very strongly pointed out in the passage before us. The law itself has been explained as spiritual; and as extending to the whole of man's duty, whether to God or man. This, as you have heard,

was originally given to man as a covenant of life: and, if man had obeyed it perfectly, it would have given him a title to life. But to man in his fallen state, “that which was ordained to life is found to be unto death.” The first use, therefore, of the law now is, as a monitor, to guard us against adhering to the first covenant. The second use is as *an instructor, to guide us to a better covenant*^a. And it is in this view that I am to speak of it at this time.

You will perceive that I exclude from my discussion every thing which does not immediately belong to my argument. The subject itself is exceedingly extensive, and might easily be pursued through a great variety of branches, all useful and important in their place. But to prosecute it to this extent would be to weaken the general impression. I wish the whole of what I shall have to offer to be an answer to the question specified in the words before us, “*Wherefore then serveth the law?*” To shew what the law is, was necessary of course: so that the exhibition of that was no deviation from my plan, but rather indispensable to the prosecution of it. And my strict adherence to this line, if it appear to leave out much which might *enrich* the subject, will have this advantage at least, that it will *simplify* the subject. And, in truth, after having so solemnly prepared your minds for it in the first discourse, I should feel that I were criminally inattentive to your feelings, if I did not labour to the uttermost to keep that alone in view which I then described to be of so much importance.

To open, then, that part of the subject on which I am now entering, I must shew, in the first place, *What we refer to as that better covenant*; and then, *How the law, as an instructor, guides us to it*.

First, What do we mean by that better covenant? What better covenant has God given us? You will naturally say, Let us know, distinctly, what the covenant is? With whom it was made? In what respects

^a ver. 24.

it is a better covenant? And, after all, what it has to do with the subject before us?

To these points I will briefly address myself in succession.

What the covenant is, the Prophet Jeremiah will inform us: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people^b." But has this any thing to do with us under the Christian dispensation? Yes: twice does the Apostle quote that very passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews^c; expressly declaring, in both places, that it is that very covenant which we, under the Gospel dispensation, are supposed to have embraced.

But when, and with whom, was this covenant made? It is that covenant which God made with Abraham, when he promised to him, that "in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed^d." St. Peter, addressing the Jews of his day, says, "Ye are the children of the Prophets, and of the *covenant* which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed^e."

But what have we to do with it? St. Paul tells us, it is the *Gospel covenant*, whereby we, and every one under the Gospel dispensation, must be saved: "The Scripture," says he, "foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, *preached before the Gospel unto Abraham*, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed^f."

^b Jer. xxxi. 31—33.

^c Heb. viii. 8—10. and x. 15—17.

^d Gen. xviii. 18. xxii. 18. xxvi. 4.

^e Acts iii. 25.

^f Gal. iii. 8.

But in what respects is this a better covenant? It is by God himself called “a better covenant:” and well does it deserve that name; since, as he tells us, it is “established upon better promises.” The covenant, so far as it was a national covenant, made with the Jewish people, promised nothing but temporal blessings; and, as made with Adam in Paradise, and with all mankind in him, it promised nothing but upon perfect obedience. But the new covenant engages to supply our every want: it points out a Saviour to us; and makes over to us, not pardon only, but purity; assuring us, that God will send to us his Holy Spirit, to renew us after the Divine image; and to give us, not heaven only, but also a meetness for the enjoyment of it. One of its principal provisions is, “A new heart will I give unto you, and a new spirit will I put within you.” In a word, the covenant of works required every thing, and imparted nothing: whereas the covenant of grace imparts every thing, and requires nothing, except that we should receive thankfully what God offers to us freely, in the Son of his love. (Of course, in the free offers of God I include the new heart, of which I have just spoken, and the entire sanctification of the life as flowing from it.) I may add, too, that the new covenant has a better Mediator. Moses, the mediator of the covenant of works, could do nothing for his people, but make known to them what God had revealed to him: whereas our Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, is ever living to intercede for us with the Father; and has in himself a fulness treasured up for us, a fulness of all that we ever can stand in need of. In fact, he is not a *Mediator* only of the covenant, but a “*Surety* of it^g” also: and he engages with us for God, and with God for us: with us for God, that “he shall never depart from us to do us good;” and with God for us, that “he will put his fear in our hearts, so that we shall never depart from him^h.” This, I say, is the very covenant which he makes with us: and it is from

^g Heb. vii. 22.

^h Jer. xxxii. 40

this that we derive all our hopes both of grace and gloryⁱ.

You will still ask, What, after all, has this to do with the argument before us? I answer, It is the covenant which St. Paul declares to have been made with Abraham for the benefit of himself and all his believing posterity; and which he therefore calls us to lay hold on, in order that we may be delivered from the curse entailed on us by the first covenant. Hear his own statement, in the passage which on the last occasion we considered: "All," says he, "are cursed by the law:" but "Christ has redeemed us from that curse, *that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles, through Jesus Christ.*" Then, lest we should think that the Abrahamic covenant was superseded by that which was afterwards made with Moses, he observes, that it could not be disannulled by any transaction that took place with Moses on Mount Sinai, because only one of the parties that were interested in it was present on that occasion. Then comes his question, "*Wherefore, then, serveth the law?*" And this he answers by observing, that "it was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made;" or, in other words, that it was to be introductory to a new covenant, and to prepare men for their admission into it. Still, however, as there was, in appearance, an opposition between the two covenants, he asks, "Is the law then against the promises of God? No: God forbid!" says he: "for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded (*shut up*) all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept (*kept in close custody*) under the law, *shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.* Wherefore the law, so far from *keeping us from Christ* to be justified by works, was actually our schoolmaster to *bring us to Christ*, that we might be

ⁱ See Heb. x. 14—17.

justified *by faith*." Hence he concludes, that, "faith being now come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster, but are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

We see, then, what the better covenant is, and wherein its superiority consists; the one being a covenant of works, and the other, of grace. We see, also, that the covenant of works, though republished four hundred and thirty years after the covenant made with Abraham, was not intended to supersede the covenant of grace, but to be subservient to it, and to shut up men to it, and to constrain them to embrace it.

I am fearful of obscuring the subject by multiplying citations of Holy Writ: I will, therefore, close this part with merely adducing one passage as explanatory of the whole. St. Paul, *contrasting the two covenants*, represents each of them as declaring to us its own terms, precisely in the way that I have done: "Moses describeth the righteousness of the law, That the man that *doeth* those things shall live by them. But the righteousness of *faith* speaketh on this wise: Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is to bring Christ down from above:) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thine heart; that is, *the word of faith which we preach*; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation^k."

Having then shewn what this better covenant is, I now come to shew how the law, as an instructor, guides us to this better covenant; or, as my text expresses it, how it is "a schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith."

It must ever be borne in mind, that the law can

^k Rom. x. 5—10.

never be set aside : in its requirements, and in its sanctions, it is unalterable, even as God himself is. It is holy, and can never abate of its commands ; it is just, and can never mitigate its sanctions ; it is good, and must eternally continue so, whatever may become of those who are subject to its dominion. In every thing which it requires, its direct tendency is, to promote the honour of God, and the happiness of man ; and, if it become an occasion of unhappiness to any, it is only through their own perverseness in violating its commands. Being, then, thus immutable, what does it say to us ? It says, ‘ The curse I have denounced, must be inflicted ; and the commands I have given must be obeyed. If there be any person found to endure the one for you, and to fulfil the other, and God be pleased to accept him in your behalf, it is well. But without such a deference to my rights, and such a regard to my honour, shall no flesh living be saved. I must “ be magnified and made honourable¹” in the eyes of the whole creation, before any child of man shall find acceptance with Him from whom I proceeded, and whose authority I maintain^m.’

Thus, so to speak, the law puts us upon looking out for a Saviour. But where shall one be found that answers to this character, or can by any means sustain this office ? Where shall we find one who is capable of bearing the wrath of Almighty God ? Where shall we find one that is capable of obeying in all things the perfect law of God ? And, above all, where shall we find one that can do these things *for us* ? A creature must sink under the wrath of God : for that wrath is everlasting. There can never

¹ Isai. xlii. 21.

^m The *dialogue form*, which the Apostle makes use of in this passage, has been adopted by the Author in this and the preceding Discourse, in order to compress a great mass of materials into the smallest possible space, and to employ them, as he hopes, to the greatest possible advantage. He is aware that the style is unusual in this species of composition (it is unusual even in his own writings) : but if it convey the truth more forcibly, he hopes it may on this occasion be excused. The same form of dialogue, with all its abruptness, is used also by the Apostle, in the third chapter to the Romans.

come a period when that curse shall end, and the cup which the sinner is doomed to drink of shall be exhausted. So also, if a creature, even the highest archangel, were to subject himself to the controul of the law, he could obey only for himself. As a creature, he would be bound to fulfil all that the law has enjoined: he could do nothing beyond what was absolutely required; and therefore, after all, he would be only an unprofitable servant. He could not obey for others: he could not exceed what was due from himself. The only thing that could give the slightest hope to man, so far at least as has ever been revealed, would be, for God himself to put himself in the place of sinners, and in their nature to suffer and obey for them. But how could this be hoped? How could such a thought as this be entertained, for a moment, in the bosom of God, or in the mind of any of his creatures? Were this possible, there might indeed be a hope; because the dignity of the sufferer would put a value on his sufferings, sufficient to overbalance the eternal sufferings of the whole world; and the obedience paid by the Lawgiver himself, who could be under no obligation to obey it, till he had assumed our nature for that very end, would be sufficient to form a justifying righteousness for all the sinners of mankind. But how can such a thing be contemplated for a moment? How can it come within the verge of *probability*—I might almost say, of *possibility*? But, whatever be thought of this matter, the law says, ‘I can consent to no lower terms than these. Suppose such a plan sanctioned, approved, and executed by the Almighty himself, then I can consent to the salvation of sinners; yea, I can not only *consent* to it, but highly *approve* of it; because, by having Jehovah himself enduring my penalties, and executing my commands, I shall be infinitely more glorified than I ever could have been either by the obedience or condemnation of the whole human race. Let but such a covenant as this be made and executed on God’s part, and I consent that you shall be saved by it; yea, and that you shall

receive a weight of glory far beyond what you ever could have received, if you had never fallen.'

Such hints we may suppose to be given by the law. And now we look into the Gospel, to find whether such an idea ever was, or could be, realized. And behold, with what amazement must we see that such a plan has actually been devised and executed by Almighty God! Can it be indeed, that God has assumed our nature, and obeyed and suffered in our stead, and wrought out a righteousness for us, that, being clothed in it, we may stand without spot or blemish before him? Yes; it is true: "God has been manifest in the flesh," and "made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted:" he has also fulfilled the law in its utmost possible extent: he has, moreover, "borne our sins in his own body on the tree," and for our sakes "become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." "To redeem us from the curse of the law, he has actually become a curse for us:" yes, "He, who knew no sin, has become sin for us; that we, who had, and could have, no righteousness, might be made the righteousness of God in him." This point, then, being clearly ascertained, let us hear our divine *instructor*, and sit at the feet of this heavenly "*schoolmaster*." Methinks I hear the law saying to me, 'You have heard the strictness of my demands, and the awfulness of my denunciations: now hear the end for which I have so proclaimed both the one and the other: it has been to shew you your need of a Saviour; it has been to make you welcome this Saviour, and embrace him with your whole hearts. Had I been less strict in my demands, or less awful in my denunciations, you would still have adhered to *me*, and founded your hopes on *me*. But I have thundered thus, in order to drive you to despair of ever finding acceptance through me; and to urge you, with all possible speed and earnestness, to lay hold on the hope set before you in the Gospel.'

Let me now suppose one to ask, 'But how shall I go to the Saviour? How shall I obtain an interest in him? How shall I procure his favour? What would

he have me do, in order to recommend myself to him?" In reply to all these anxious inquiries, our "schoolmaster" gives us this important information:— 'You must not attempt to recommend yourselves to him by any works whatever: you must go ignorant, that you may be enlightened; guilty, that you may be pardoned; polluted, that you may be purified; enslaved, that you may experience his complete redemption. You must carry nothing to him but your wants and miseries; and expect nothing at his hands but as the fruit of his mediation, and as the free gift of God for his sake. You must renounce every thing of your own; and desire to "have him made all unto you, your wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, that to all eternity you may glory in the Lord alone°." If you entertain the idea of meriting or earning any thing at his hands by your own good works, you will only come back to me, and be dealt with according to the terms proposed by me. You must disclaim all thought of this; and be content to be saved by grace alone, and to receive every thing out of the fulness that is treasured up in Christ. For this end, you must trust in him, and live altogether by faith in him. You well know how a branch receives every thing from the stock into which it has been engrafted: precisely thus must you receive from him all the blessings both of grace and glory. You must by faith abide in him: and, by virtue derived from him, bring forth fruit to the glory of his name. This is a way of salvation both *suited to you*, and *honourable to God*: it is *suited to you*, because it provides every thing for you as a free gift: and it is *honourable to God*, because, whilst it preserves my honour inviolate, it exalts and glorifies every perfection of the Deity. I charge you, then, embrace the covenant which Christ has ratified with his blood: exercise faith in him: look to him as the procuring cause of all your blessings. And be not discouraged by any sense of your own unworthiness; but go to him as the very chief of sinners, that you

° John vi. 28.

° 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

may be made the brightest monuments of his grace. "It was for sinners that he came, to call them to repentance:" it was "the lost, and them alone, whom he came to save:" and the more deeply you feel your need of him, the more readily will he receive you to the arms of mercy: for his address to persons in your very state is, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest:" "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool:" "him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

And now, after having heard the advice given by the law, shall I go too far, if I entreat you all to sit at the feet of this schoolmaster, as his disciples? I grant, that there is an aspect of severity about him: but he will teach you aright. He is sent by God himself for your instruction: and all who will obey his dictates shall assuredly be guided into the way of peace. Other instructors, beside the law, you will find in great numbers, who will speak to you in milder terms, and accommodate themselves more to your carnal minds. But O! listen not to them. Many pleasing statements they will give, about the value of good works, and the mercy of God, and about the Saviour having lowered the terms of salvation to sincere obedience. But they will only deceive you to your ruin. Take their favourite term, of *sincere obedience*: no matter whether it be to the moral law, or to a reduced and mitigated law of their own formation: let it be a law of any kind that can possibly be conceived to have proceeded from God; and then suppose yourselves to stand or fall by your sincere obedience to that law: where is there one amongst you that ever could be saved? If this is the standard by which you are to be tried, it has been so from the beginning of your life: and where is there one amongst us that has from the beginning of his life *sincerely* striven with all his might to mortify every inclination which his judgment condemned; and to fulfil, to the uttermost, every duty, both to God and man, so far as he was acquainted with it, or

might have been acquainted with it, if he had *sincerely* improved every opportunity of gaining instruction? Who has from his earliest youth acted up fully to the light that he has enjoyed, and done every thing which he knew or believed to be required of him? Nay, who would dare to stand upon this ground for any one day of his life, and consent that his everlasting doom should be determined by the issue of such a trial? Know, then, that these blind instructors will, if listened to, betray you to your everlasting ruin. Some there are, who, “unable to endure sound doctrine,” will labour to shew, that all which is spoken in the Gospel about faith in Christ means no more than a general belief of his word; and that, after all, salvation is, and must be, in part at least, by the works of the law. But, if any man will say that Christ hath either repealed or mitigated, let him shew us what law that is which Christ has repealed, or mitigated, and reduced to the standard of human capacity to obey it. But this no man on earth can shew. The law is unalterable, both in its demands and sanctions; and if we will but listen to it as our instructor, it will guide us infallibly to the Saviour of the world. It will tell you plainly, ‘I cannot save you, either in whole or in part: but the Lord Jesus Christ both can, and will, if you will believe in him. And, if you needed an intercessor with the Father to receive you for Christ’s sake, I myself, if permitted to be heard, would become your friend: yes, I, who have denounced so many curses against you, would willingly become your advocate. If suffered to address the Most High, I would say, Thou thyself, O God, didst appoint thy Son Jesus Christ to be their Surety: and HE has paid to me the utmost farthing of their debt. Did I demand, that all the curses which the violation of my precepts merited, should be inflicted? they have been borne by him. Did I require that perfect obedience should be rendered to my commands? it has been rendered by him. Only admit Him, therefore, as their Surety, and I have nothing to demand at their hands: or rather

my demand must be, that they who plead the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ for them, may stand accepted through his righteousness; and may be rewarded with eternal life, precisely as they would have been, if they had themselves fulfilled all that I required of them. Nay, I would even go further, and ask, that they may be recompensed with a higher degree of glory than they ever could have attained by their own obedience; because the obedience and sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ their Saviour have done infinitely greater honour to me than ever could have been done either by the obedience or sufferings of the whole world.'

Listen, then, I entreat you, to the counsels of this instructor. They are safe: nor can they be resisted, but at the peril of your souls. Only get a clear understanding of that question, "*Wherefore, then, serveth the law?*" and then you will be prepared for all the blessings of the Gospel, and find in Christ all that your necessities require.

An illustration of my whole subject shall now place it in a point of view in which it cannot possibly be misapprehended. O that God may be graciously pleased to open all our hearts, to discern, to embrace, to realize the truth as it shall now be exhibited before you! We have supposed you all to be condemned by the law; and to be precisely in the condition of the Israelites when bitten by the fiery serpents; incapable of restoring yourselves to health, or of finding any healing balm in the whole universe. What now shall be done? Death is sweeping you off in quick succession; and, ah! whither is it bearing you? But for you, who are yet alive, can no remedy be found? Yes: Moses shall point out a remedy;—that very Moses, who gave the law, and denounced the curse against all who should transgress it;—that very Moses, I say, shall be your instructor and counsellor: and "if you believe Moses, you shall believe in Christ." By God's command he erected a brazen serpent; and proclaimed the joyful tidings, that all who should look

unto it should be saved. The opportunity was gladly embraced by the perishing multitudes, and the means were instantly crowned with the desired success. And happy am I to say, that at this very moment is *that transaction renewed* in the midst of you. You are all dying of the wounds of sin. Not a creature in the universe can render you the least assistance towards a recovery from your perishing condition. But the Lord Jesus Christ is this day “set forth crucified in the midst of you:” and the law itself, yes, the law itself, I say, directs you to Him, as God’s appointed ordinance for your salvation. This day does the law proclaim itself as your instructor, “to bring you to Christ, that you may be justified by faith in him.” And is this an illustration of mine? Is the comparison between the two a mere accidental coincidence? No: the one was intended, by God himself, to be an illustration of the other. Hear the application of this record, as it was made by our Lord Jesus Christ himself: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so shall the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” View, then, the Saviour this day erected on the cross; and hear him addressing you in these gracious terms, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth! for I am God, and there is none else,” “no Saviour beside me.”

Thus, then, you see that both the law and the Gospel, if properly understood, speak the same language. Both the one and the other say, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” “All that believe in him are justified from all things.” “In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.” May God Almighty discover to us all this blessed truth, and give us the sweet experience of it in our own souls! Sure I am, that, if our last discourse placed the law in a terrific view, you cannot now do otherwise than behold it as a most faithful counsellor and friendly instructor: and,

if it please God to accompany his word with power to your souls, you will have reason to bless God for every wound that has been inflicted; and will enter fully into our next discourse, with a determination, through grace, that, whilst you flee from the law as a covenant, you will not neglect it as a rule of life; but will rather “delight in it in your inward man,” and aspire after the most perfect conformity to it in the whole of your deportment.

MMLXVII.

THE THIRD USE OF THE LAW, AS A RULE OF LIFE.

Gal. iii. 19. *Wherefore then serveth the law?*

THE last use of the law being now to be contemplated, we shall set before you the law *as a rule to govern us, when we have embraced the new covenant.* And it is with peculiar pleasure that I enter upon this subject, because there exists at this day, precisely as there did in the apostolic age, a jealousy upon the subject of good works, and a fear lest the free salvation of the Gospel should render men indifferent to them. You will remember, that St. Paul's statements gave occasion to men to ask, “Shall we, then, continue in sin, that grace may abound^a?” And the same thoughts may possibly have arisen in your minds, whilst I have with all the clearness in my power, shewn, that we are not, in any degree whatever, to seek justification by the works of the law, but solely and exclusively by faith in Christ. I did, indeed, endeavour to guard against such thoughts, by intimating, in the very first instance, that there was a third end and use of the law, namely, to be a rule of life to the believer: but had I been less guarded in this respect, and left this point to be developed afterwards, without any previous intimation of my purpose, I fear that the same objections, as

^a Rom. vi. 1.

were urged against the Apostle's statements, would have greatly enervated mine, and prevented that favourable reception which I hope, through the tender mercy of God, they have met with in your minds. But I have longed for the present occasion, that I might vindicate the Gospel from the charge of licentiousness; and prove, to the satisfaction of you all, that it is indeed, what the Apostle calls it, "a doctrine according to godliness."

St. Paul was at all times most anxious to guard against a misconception of his sentiments and conduct on account of his neglect of the ceremonial law. The one great object of his ministry was, to win souls to Christ. For the advancement of this end, he conformed, in all matters of indifference, to the views of those amongst whom he ministered; "to the Jews, becoming a Jew; to those who were under the law, as under the law; and to those who were without law, as without law." But, fearing lest these compliances of his might be construed as a contempt of the divine authority, he took care to remove all ground for such an idea, by declaring, that he still considered himself as much bound to obey God as ever; or, rather, that he felt himself under additional obligations to fulfil all the divine commands, in consideration of the unbounded mercy that had been vouchsafed to him through Jesus Christ. He had, it is true, neglected the observances of the law: but it had not been from any disrespect to God's commands, but because that law was in fact abrogated; whereas the moral law was as much in force as ever: and to the latest hour of his life he should look upon himself as "under that law to Christ^b."

This acknowledgment of his comes fully to our point. It shews, that he still regarded the law as a rule of life; and it gives me a fair opportunity,

1st, To establish the perpetuity of the law, as a rule of life; and,

2dly, To enforce its obligations.

^b 1 Cor. ix. 21.

I. In order to establish the perpetuity of the law as a rule of life, let it be remembered, that the law is a perfect transcript of the mind and will of God. It arises necessarily out of the relation which we bear to him and to each other. It did not depend on any arbitrary appointment of the Deity, (except, indeed, so far as the Sabbath is concerned,) but would have been equally in force whether it had been the subject of a particular revelation or not. Allowance, indeed, will, as St. Paul informs us, be made for those, who, for want of a revelation, have but very imperfect conceptions respecting the Divine will^c: but, wherever that is known, it must be a rule of conduct to man, and will be a rule of judgment to God. No change of circumstances whatever can alter its demands. In whatever situation we be, it must be our duty to love God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves: nor can this law by any means be dispensed with. In truth, God cannot dispense with *any part of* this law; for if he did, he would authorize men to *despoil themselves* of his image, and to *rob him* of his glory.

That the law is still a rule of duty to the people of God, appears from that injunction of St. Paul, in the thirteenth chapter to the Romans: "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another *hath fulfilled the law*." Then, specifying the duties contained in the second table of the law as essential constituents of true love, he adds, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore *love is the fulfilling of the law*^d." Consequently, if it is our duty to exercise love, it is our duty to fulfil the law, which is in all respects identified with love.

But to insist on this is needless: for, instead of the law being superseded by the Lord Jesus Christ, it is in his hand more imperative than ever, and comes to us with tenfold obligations to obey it: and this is the point to which I mean to call your particular attention. To say that "we are not without law to God," is comparatively a small matter: the point I

^c Rom. ii. 14, 15.

^d Rom. xiii. 8—10.

am to establish is, that “we are under the law to Christ.”

In confirmation of this, I assert, that our obedience to the law was contemplated by God himself: first, in all that Christ did and suffered for us; next, in his liberating of us from the law as a covenant of works; and, lastly, in his admission of us into a new covenant, the covenant of grace.

First, I say, *our obedience to the law was one great object which our Lord and Saviour had in view, in all that he did and suffered for us.* It was not from death only that he came to save us, but from sin. Indeed, he was on that very account “named Jesus, because he was to save his people from their sins^e.” Hear how plainly this was declared concerning him, even before he came into the world: “Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, when filled with the Holy Ghost, prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, MIGHT SERVE HIM without fear, *in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life^f.*” This clearly shews, that, instead of “making void the law, Christ has established” its authority to the very end of time. And to this agrees the testimony of St. Paul: “He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” And again, expressly advertising to the government which Jesus still maintains over his people, he says, “None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself: for whether we live, *we live unto the Lord*; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s: *for to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and living^g.*”

^e Matt. i. 21. ^f Luke i. 67—75. ^g Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

Next I say, that *our obedience to the law was a most important end, for which we are liberated from the law as a covenant of works.* This is repeatedly asserted by St. Paul. In the eighth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, he says, “The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death:” (that is, the Gospel hath freed me from the law :) “for what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, hath condemned sin in the flesh:” (and now observe for what end)—“*that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit^h.*” The law could neither justify nor sanctify us: the Gospel does both: and the very end for which Christ has liberated us from the law, was, that both these ends might be accomplished in us.

To this I will add a passage, which needs no explanation: it is so clear, so precise, so full to the point, that it leaves no doubt upon the subject. St. Paul, speaking of his own experience, says, “I, through the law, am dead to the law, that I might live unto Godⁱ.” Here you perceive that it was the law itself which made him dead to the law. It was so rigorous in its demands, and so awful in its sanctions, that he utterly despaired of obtaining salvation by it; and, *in this view*, became wholly dead to it. But did he therefore neglect it as a rule of life? Quite the reverse: “Through the law, he was dead to the law, *that he might live unto God,*” and serve him in newness of life.

But there is an illustration of this matter given us by the Apostle, which places it in a still clearer point of view; in a view at once peculiarly beautiful, and unquestionably just. In the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans he compares the law to a man to whom the Church is united, as it were, in the bonds of marriage. He then observes, that, as a wife is bound to her husband by the nuptial contract as long

^h Rom. viii. 2—4.

ⁱ Gal. ii. 19.

as he lives, and would be justly called an adulteress if she were to connect herself with another man during his life, so are we united in the closest bonds of the law. But, by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and his satisfying all the demands of that law for us, its power over us is annulled, and it becomes, from the very moment of our believing in him, dead with respect to us ; so that we are at liberty to be united to Christ, and to enter into a new covenant with him. This benefit, he observes, we derive from Christ. But for what end ? That our obligations to holiness may be vacated ? No ; by no means ; but the very reverse : he conveys this benefit, in order that, in our new-covenant state, we may bring forth that fruit, which we never did, nor could, bring forth in connexion with our former husband. Hear his own words : “ Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,)” (*I beg you to pay particular attention to this, because it is addressed to those especially who know the law,*) “ Know ye not how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth ? For the woman who hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth ; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then, if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress : but, if her husband be dead, she is free from that law ; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ” (that is, through the sufferings of Christ, the power of the law over you is cancelled), “ that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, *that ye should bring forth fruit unto God*^k.” If there were no other passage in all the Scriptures than this, it would be quite sufficient, not only to establish the point in hand, but to silence, for ever, all jealousies respecting the practical intent and tendency of the Gospel.

But I must go on yet further to observe, in the

^k Rom. vii. 1—4.

last place, that *our obedience to the law is one of the chief blessings conferred upon us by the new covenant, the covenant of grace.* You will remember, that the first covenant merely says, “Do this, and live.” It condemns for disobedience; but never does any thing towards enabling us to obey. But what says God to us in the new covenant? “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my law into their mind, and write it in their hearts^l.” And again, “A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh: and I will put my Spirit within you, and *cause you to walk in my statutes, and to keep my judgments and do them^m.*” Here, by the very terms of the new covenant, is obedience to the law infallibly secured; because God himself undertakes to work it in us by the influences of his good Spirit. His assured promise to every one that embraces the new covenant is, “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under graceⁿ.”

Hence, then, you see the perpetuity of the law fully established. It is only *in its covenant form* that it is cancelled: as *a rule of duty*, it is, as I have before observed, altogether unchangeable: and its authority, instead of being invalidated by the Gospel, is confirmed and strengthened by it: since our obedience to it was, as I have distinctly shewn, first, the end *for which Christ came into the world*; next, the end *for which he delivered us from the law as a covenant of works*; and, lastly, the end *for which he has brought us into the new covenant, the covenant of grace.* In answer, therefore, to every one who doubts the practical tendency of the Gospel, we are prepared to say, with the Apostle Paul, “Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid^o.”

Having thus endeavoured, with the utmost plainness,

^l Heb. viii. 10.

^m Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

ⁿ Rom. vi. 14.

^o Rom. vi. 15.

to shew that we are still under the law to Christ, I come,

In the II.^d place, to enforce its obligations.

Is the law designed to be a rule to govern us after we have laid hold on the covenant of grace? Let us use it for that end, without attempting to lower any one of its demands, and with the utmost cheerfulness and zeal. Let us, first, *use it for that end*. Doubtless, its primary uses must be carefully kept in remembrance. We must never forget, that its first office is, to convince us of sin, and to shew us our undone state, according to the covenant of works. In this view it must produce in us the deepest humiliation, and an utter renunciation of all dependence on our own works, either in whole or in part, for justification before God. Its next use must be, to drive us to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, that we may obtain salvation through his meritorious death and passion. There is no righteousness but his, that is commensurate with its demands; and there is no other in which we can ever stand accepted before God. These things, I say, we must ever bear in remembrance; and be careful never to make, in any degree, our obedience to the law a ground of our hope. But, having this well settled in our minds, we must address ourselves to a diligent performance of all that the law enjoins. It is by this that we are to shew ourselves to have experienced a work of grace in our souls: for “we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” If we profess to hope that we have been “chosen of God” and “predestinated unto life,” shall we make these mysterious truths an occasion of remissness in the path of duty? God forbid: on the contrary, we must ever bear in mind, that, if we have been chosen of God at all, “we have been chosen *that we may be holy*, and without blame before him in love;” and if we have been predestinated by God at all, we have been predestinated “*to be conformed to the image of his Son.*” And if we glory in the finished work of

Christ (for you will take notice that I am following the Antinomian into all his strong-holds), we must remember what his end was in accomplishing salvation for us: "We have been bought with a price, *that we may glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his.*" There are two great errors from which we must keep equally remote; namely, from legal dependence on our own obedience to the law, and, at the same time, from an Antinomian contempt of its commands. We must distinguish between the motives and principles by which we are actuated, and which determine the true quality of our actions. Whatever we do, in order to earn salvation by it, will be rejected of God, and will disappoint our hopes: but, whatever we do from a sense of duty to God, and with a view to honour the Saviour and evince the sincerity of our love to him, will be accepted for his sake, and will receive a proportionable reward of grace. Only take care that your obedience be from faith and love, and not from a vain hope to purchase the Divine favour; and then will you answer the true ends of your deliverance from the law as a covenant of works, and of your subjection to it as a rule of life.

In enforcing the obligations of the law, I would next say, *Attempt not in any thing to lower its demands.* We have before shewn, that, as a covenant, it recedes not from its commands of perfect obedience; no, not in one jot or tittle of its requirements. And, as a rule, its requirements are of equal extent. It enjoins us to love God with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our soul, and all our strength; and to love our neighbour as ourselves: and no lower standard must we propose to ourselves for our daily walk. We must not be satisfied with the world's standard: we must not be contented with a round of duties, and the performance of a few kind and charitable acts. "We must die unto sin altogether, and live unto righteousness." We must seek to have "the whole body of sin crucified within us;" and must "delight ourselves in the law after our inward man,"

and strive to “perfect holiness in the fear of God.” Nothing must satisfy us, but the attainment of “God’s perfect image in righteousness and true holiness.” If the law is our rule, Christ himself must be our pattern: we must endeavour to “walk in all things as he walked,” and to “purify ourselves even as he is pure.” Nothing short of absolute perfection should satisfy our minds: we should strive to be “holy, as God himself is holy,” and to be “perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Now, need I say that these efforts are very rarely seen? and that, when seen, they are almost universally discountenanced and discouraged? Cautions in plenty are given, “not to be righteous *over-much*,” but who ever hears the friendly caution, to “be righteous *enough*?” If we are outwardly decent and moral, we may be as regardless of the state of our souls before God as we please, and no one will warn us of our danger: but, if the love of Christ constrain us to devote ourselves altogether unto him, there is a general alarm respecting us; and nothing is heard but cautions and warnings on every side.

Let it not be imagined that I would recommend any thing that savours of real enthusiasm or fanaticism: so far from it, I would discourage these evils to the utmost of my power: but, if love to God and love to man be, by common consent, as it were, branded with these names, I say, let not any man be deterred from the performance of his duty by any opprobrious names whatever; but let every one aspire after universal holiness, and seek to “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God^p.”

One thing more would I say; namely this: *In your obedience to the law, be willing servants.* We are not to serve the Lord “grudgingly, or of necessity,” but “with a willing mind.” What St. Paul has spoken on this head deserves peculiar attention. He says, “Now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held: that we should *serve*

God in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter^q." Here he refers to the same image as before, the dissolution of marriage by the death of our husband; and the consequent termination of those restraints, in which, during his life, we were held. But what is to be the effect of this liberty? an abandonment of ourselves to sin? No: but an obeying of our new husband, not in the servile way to which we have been accustomed, but with real pleasure and delight, panting after the highest possible perfection both of heart and life. This service we are to account perfect freedom: and we are to live altogether for him, "running the way of his commandments with enlarged hearts." Now, "wherever the Spirit is, there is this liberty^r." But, alas! how little of this liberty is seen in the Christian world! Instead of panting to attain "the full measure of the stature of Christ," we are satisfied with our own stunted growth; so that, in the course of several years, scarcely any improvement is visible in us. The little we do for the Lord, is rather "from constraint, than willingly." Our defects create in us no real humiliation: our weakness stimulates us not to earnest cries for help: our inability to fulfil our duty leads us not to exult and glory in the work of Christ, or to clothe ourselves from day to day with his perfect righteousness. No: of these feelings, respecting which I spoke largely in my first discourse, the generality are wholly destitute; and *therefore* destitute, because they understand not the law either in its condemning or its commanding power. Ignorant of the law, they are of necessity ignorant of the Gospel also; and, consequently, are strangers to all those high and holy feelings which the Gospel inspires. Be it however remembered, that if, "through the knowledge of the law, we be, as we must be, dead to the law," we shall account it our first duty, and our truest happiness, to "live unto our God."

^q Rom. vii. 6.^r 2 Cor. iii. 17.

Before I close my subject, I think you will not deem me presumptuous if I venture to address a few words to *my brethren* who either are already *in the ministry*, or are preparing to engage in that sacred office. I think it must strike you, that this subject has by no means that prominence in our public addresses which its importance demands. If it be true, that without the knowledge of the law we cannot understand the Gospel, the neglect of opening the law is most injurious to the souls of men. I know, indeed, that God may, by convincing men of sin, supply that defect; and lead them to a simple reliance on the Saviour, even whilst they are ignorant of the spirituality of the law, and of the uses for which it was promulgated: but still they cannot be truly enlightened Christians; nor can their faith be so firm as it would be, if they had more enlarged views of the Gospel. But how can we hope that this work of conviction should prevail amongst our hearers, when we withhold from them God's appointed means of producing it in their souls? In truth, this accounts, in a great measure, for the inefficiency of our ministrations. In numberless places, during a whole course of years, not so much as a single instance is found of a sinner being "pricked to the heart, and crying out, What must I do to be saved?" or, if such an instance occur, it is found only in some one who is condemned by the mere letter of the law. But it would not be so, if the law were preached by us in all its spirituality and extent, and the Gospel were represented as God's only remedy for the salvation of men. A simple exhibition of these truths would reach the heart, and would be accompanied with power from on high. Let me then entreat you, for your own sake, and for your people's sake, to study the law; and to make the use of it which God has especially ordained, even to drive them, like the pursuer of blood, to the refuge that is set before them in the Gospel.

If there be amongst us *any who yet cannot understand* this subject, let me next address them,

and entreat that they will not too hastily dismiss it from their minds : for verily, it demands from every child of man the most attentive consideration. I know that prejudices do exist, even as they have in all ages existed, against both the Law and the Gospel ; against the Law as severe, and against the Gospel as licentious. But, to every one of you I must say, Take heed to this subject : for “ it is your life :” and, in unfolding it to you, I have, with all possible fidelity, “ set life and death before you.” Let the law, I pray you, have its first work in convincing you of sin. Let it then operate effectually to bring you to Christ. And, lastly, let it serve you as a rule, to which your whole life shall be conformed. Set not yourselves against it in any one of these views : set not yourselves against it, as too harsh in its covenant form, or too lax in its abrogated state, or too strict in its requirements as a rule : but improve it for all the ends for which it has been given ; so shall it work its whole work within you, and bring you in safety to God, to holiness, to glory.

But I trust there are amongst us not a few who really “ *know the law,*” and *approve of it in all its uses.* And to them, lastly, I would address myself. To them, in particular, I would say, Be sure that you unreservedly give yourselves up to God. Those who enter not into your views, will judge both of you and of your principles by the holiness of your lives. Let them see in you what the tendency of the Gospel really is : let them see, that “ the grace of God, which brings salvation to you, teaches you to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, and soberly, and godly, in this present world.” You will forgive me, if I feel a more than ordinary anxiety about you. On you the honour of God and his Gospel pre-eminently depends : and I am earnestly desirous that you should “ walk worthy of your high calling ; yea, and worthy of the Lord himself also, unto all pleasing.” I would that there should not be a duty either to God or man in which you should be found remiss. Whatever your situation

particularly requires, *that* should be an object of your most diligent attention ; that, if a comparison be instituted between you and those who make no profession of religion, you may at least be found to stand on equality with the best amongst them ; and be able to say, “ Are they Hebrews ? so am I. Are they Israelites ? so am I. Are they exemplary in the whole of their deportment ? so am I.” It must never be forgotten, that the duties of the second table are as necessary to be observed as those of the first : and if there be one amongst you who would set the two at variance, I must declare my testimony against him, as greatly dishonouring the Gospel of Christ. But of the great mass of religious characters amongst you, “ I am persuaded better things, though I thus speak.” Go on then, I entreat you, and abound more and more in every thing that is excellent and praiseworthy : and, in reference to every duty that is required of you, let it be seen that you are “ under the law to Christ.” This is expected at your hands, and may well be expected : for if *you* are remiss in these things, who will be attentive to them ? Remember, it is “ by well-doing that you are to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men :” and never forget, that there is no other way of proving yourselves Christ’s disciples indeed, but by doing his will, and keeping his Commandments.^s”^t

^s John xiv. 15. 1 Cor. vii. 19. 1 John ii. 3, 4.

^t The reader, after reading these on THE LAW, is recommended to read those on THE GOSPEL, on 1 Tim. i. 11.

MMLXVIII.

THE TRUE USE OF THE LAW.

Gal. iii. 21—26. *Is the law then against the promises of God ? God forbid : for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the*

law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But, after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

THE true nature and intent of the moral law is by no means generally understood: and, if the question put by the Apostle into the mouth of an objector, “Wherefore then serveth the law?” were addressed to the great mass even of considerate Christians, very few among them would know what answer to return to it. Hence it is that such opposition is everywhere made to the free offers of the Gospel. We have continually the very same contest to maintain against the generality of Christians, as the Apostle had against the Jews. The Apostle preached, that the Messiah, the Seed in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, was come: and that all were now to be justified by faith in him, precisely as Abraham had been two thousand years before. The Jews maintained, that this could not be the true way of salvation; for that God had given a law to Moses; and that law was of perpetual obligation; and, if we were now to be justified by faith alone, the law would be made void, and had in reality been given to no purpose. To this the Apostle answers, that the law, which was given to the Jews alone, could not invalidate the promise which had many ages before been given to Abraham and all his believing seed, whether among the circumcised Jews, or the uncircumcised Gentiles; and that there was no such opposition between the two as the Jews imagined; the law being in fact designed to introduce the Gospel with more effect, and to endear it to all, when it should come to be more fully revealed. This was the state of the question between the Apostle and his opponents; to whom a complete answer is given in the words before us. The question simply was, ‘Is there any real opposition between the law as given to Moses, and the

promises as given to Abraham?" No; says the Apostle: there is a subserviency of the one to the other; and both the one and the other proclaim to us, in fact, the same salvation—salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and by faith alone.

To make this clear to the comprehension of all, I will distinctly mark what he says respecting,

I. The use of the law—

The law, when originally given to Adam in Paradise, "was ordained to life^a," and would, if perfectly fulfilled by him, have given him a title to eternal life: but, having been once broken, it is no longer capable of giving a title to life, and is only "a ministration of condemnation and death^b." Had it been possible to have given a law which should have rendered the salvation of *fallen* man consistent with the Divine attributes, God would never have given his only-begotten Son to take our nature and die for us: the publication of a new law would have been so obvious and so easy, that he would undoubtedly have preferred that^c. But no such law could be given: for, if it required the same as the original law did, namely perfect and perpetual obedience, it was impossible that that should ever be rendered to it by fallen man^d: and, if it required less, it would dispense with obligations, which *of necessity* exist between the creature and the Creator, and would, in fact, give a license to sin: which it is impossible for a holy God to do. The law then, as given to Moses, was not intended for any such purpose as this: it was intended,

1. To prepare men for the Gospel—

[The Gospel is a revelation of mercy through the incarnation and sufferings of the Son of God: and that mercy is freely offered to all who will believe in Christ. Previously to the coming of Christ, this mystery was but very imperfectly understood: but the law as published on Mount Sinai was well calculated to prepare the minds of men for the fuller

^a Rom. vii. 10.

^c ver. 21.

^b 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9.

^d Rom. viii. 3.

manifestation of it. For it made known to men *the true extent of their duty*: it shewed that we were bound to love God with *all* our heart, and *all* our mind, and *all* our soul, and *all* our strength: and to love our neighbour *in all respects* as ourselves. Nothing less than this was to be paid by us from the earliest moment of our existence to our latest breath. Revealing this, it further shewed to men *the inconceivable depth of their guilt*. By this standard are we to be tried every moment: yet in no one moment of our lives have we acted up to it, either towards God or man. On the contrary, we have been at an infinite distance from it, having been altogether engrossed by *self*, and caring nothing either for God or man, any farther than the interests of *self* might be promoted by them. Thus, not to speak of any particular actions, the whole state and habit of our minds, every day, every hour, every moment, has been as contrary to the law as darkness to light, and hell to heaven. Hence the law proceeds still further to shew men their *infinite desert of wrath and condemnation*. For every single deviation from this perfect standard, the wrath of God is denounced against us; agreeably to that sentence of the law, “Cursed is *every one* that *continueth not in all things* that are written in the book of the law to do them.” Consider then our duty as ramified in all its extent, and in one single day our sins against it are more numerous than the stars of heaven, or the sands upon the sea-shore; and of course, a proportionable weight of wrath and condemnation is entailed upon us.

Such is the light which the law reflects on our state before God: and does it not endear to us the offer of a free and full salvation? Doubtless it does: and for this end it was given, that we might the more thankfully accept the promises made to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.]

2. To shut men up to the Gospel—

[Men naturally go to the law, having no idea of obtaining salvation in any other way than by obedience to its commands. Hence the sinner, when once awakened to a concern about his soul, and sensible that he has not obeyed the law in its full extent, hopes to make a composition, as it were, and to be accepted on paying a part for the whole. But the law thunders in his ears, ‘Thou must obey me in *all things*.’ He then hopes, that the law will accept his repentance for past transgressions, and sincere obedience for the time to come. But the law replies, ‘I know nothing of repentance, or of sincere obedience: thou must pay me my full demands, and “continue obedient in *all things*” from first to last: I have stated the extent of your duty; and I have said, “Do this, and thou shalt live.” These are the only terms on which I

can offer thee any thing : if thou canst not bring perfect obedience with thee, it is in vain to come to me : thou must seek a remedy elsewhere : for I can afford thee none.' Thus the law, being inflexible in its demands, and inexorable in its denunciations, compels the sinner to look out for some other way of escape from the wrath to come, and "shuts him up" to that which is revealed in the Gospel : it declares to him, that, as long as he continues to found his hopes on the law, he is, and must be, under its curse : and, just as at the first promulgation of the law, the people, trembling with apprehensions of immediate death, entreated that God would give them a mediator, through whom they might venture to approach him ; so now the terrors of Mount Sinai constrain men to look for mercy solely through the mediation and intercession of the Lord Jesus^e. In this view "the law was to be a schoolmaster to us, to bring us to Christ:" it was by instruction to inform us, and by discipline to constrain us ; that so the promises made to us in the Gospel might become available for their destined end.]

The law thus viewed, opens to us in all its grandeur,

II. The benefit of the Gospel—

"Before faith came," and whilst the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer was but darkly and partially disclosed, the law kept men in a state of bondage, like prisoners shut up, and looking forward to a future deliverance : but, "when faith did come," and the Gospel was fully revealed, then it appeared what unspeakable mercy God had kept in store for the sinners of mankind : for by the Gospel,

1. We are liberated from the law—

[The very instant we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and lay hold on the covenant of grace, we cease to be any longer under the covenant of works. The law, *as a covenant*, has no longer any power either to command, or to condemn : it is abrogated with respect to us ; yea, it is dead : and has no more power over us, or connexion with us, than a man who is dead has with the widow whom he has left behind him. This is not only affirmed by the Apostle, but is illustrated also by this very image. "If," says he, "her husband is dead, the woman is loosed from the law of her husband : so we are become dead to the law and the law is become dead

^e Deut. v. 23—28.

to us, by the body of Christ; yea, we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held^f." And this effect is produced by the law itself; as he also tells us in the chapter preceding our text: "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God^g:" that is, the law so utterly condemns me, that I can have no hope from it whatever, and am forced, whether I will or not, to renounce all dependence upon it, and to live no longer as one who hopes to earn life for himself, but as one who seeks only to honour and glorify his Redeemer. Hear the account which St. Paul gives of this matter in another epistle. Speaking to those who had believed in Christ, he says, "Ye are not come unto the Mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard, entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: but ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the just made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel^h." In a word, the moment we believe in Christ, "we are no longer under a schoolmaster," or, as it is elsewhere said, "we are no longer under the law, but under graceⁱ."]

2. We are brought into possession of all spiritual and eternal blessings—

["We are justified by faith^k;" we are "justified freely from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses^l:" Our "sins, whatever they may have been, are put as far from us as the east is from the west^m:" "nor shall they ever more be remembered against us." Nor is this all: we are brought into the very family of God, and "made the children of God by faith in Christ Jesusⁿ." Nor are we children only, but children of full age, who are "no longer under tutors and governors," but already admitted to the most intimate communion with our God, and enjoying, as far as in this world we can enjoy, the inheritance prepared for us^p.

And here we cannot but call your attention in a more especial manner to the means by which all these blessings are secured. It is again and again said, that they become ours

^f Rom. vii. 1—6.

^g Gal. ii. 19.

^h Heb. xii. 18—24.

ⁱ Rom. vi. 14.

^k ver. 24.

^l Acts xiii. 39.

^m Ps. ciii. 12.

ⁿ Heb. viii. 12. and x. 17.

^o ver. 26.

^p Gal. iv. 1—7.

“by faith in Christ Jesus.” There is no other way: it is simply and solely by faith: there is no mixture of works: works, so far from augmenting our title to these things, or contributing to the acquisition of them, will, if wrought for this end, cut us off from all hope of ever coming to the possession of them. So inconsistent with each other are the covenants of grace and of works, that the smallest portion of works utterly excludes grace^a; and the slightest imaginable dependence on them invalidates all that Christ has done and suffered for us. The instant we blend any thing with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we make “the promise of no effect,” and “Christ,” with respect to us, “has died in vain^r.”]

And now, in conclusion, let us INQUIRE,

1. Whence is it that there is so much occasion to insist on these truths?

[Is it that there is any difficulty in them? No; in all personal matters we find it easy enough to distinguish between a gift and a debt. We are at no loss to make this distinction, if a man, who has never done one thing for us in all his life, claim a reward at our hands. It is to little purpose that he compliments us with an appeal to our generosity: the single circumstance of his founding his hope, though in a small degree, on services which he professes to have rendered us, especially if, instead of having done us any service, he has all his days been adverse to our will and hostile to our interests, is quite sufficient to cut him off from all hope of receiving the benefits he expects. And much more may this be the case when a sinner presumes to prefer a claim of merit before his God. For what is this but the most abominable pride? Take an illustration, which will serve to place the matter in its true point of view. A prince offers pardon to his rebellious subjects, provided they will sue for it through the mediation of his son, to whom he has committed the whole government of his kingdom. Some apply in the appointed way, and are pardoned: but others say, ‘We will not accept of pardon on the terms he offers it: if the king will levy a fine upon us, we will pay it; or, if he will appoint us a service, be it never so difficult, we will perform it: but to stoop to the method which he has prescribed, namely, that of asking pardon through the mediation of his son, is a humiliation to which we will not submit.’ Who does not see, that pride is the principle by which these persons are actuated; and that, if they perish as rebels, it is altogether through their own fault? Know then, that it is pride, and pride alone, that keeps any

^a Rom. xi. 6.

^r Gal. ii. 21. and v. 2—4.

from seeing the excellency of the Gospel salvation. It is pride that makes any so averse to be saved entirely by faith without the works of the law: and, till the proud hearts of men be humbled, the Gospel will always be to them a stumbling-block, and rock of offence. But be it known to you, that, how desirous soever you may be “to establish a righteousness of your own,” you can never do it, but “must *submit* to the righteousness of God^s.”]

2. Why are we so earnest in enforcing them?

[If the present life only were concerned, we might be content to let you go on your own way. But on your acceptance or rejection of the Gospel salvation depends your happiness both in this world and the world to come. This accounts for St. Paul insisting so much on this doctrine in his Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians; and for his declaring so repeatedly, that, if they did any work whatever with a view to recommend them to Christ for justification, “Christ himself should profit them nothing.” See what he says on this subject respecting his Jewish brethren. He tells us, “that the Gentiles, who had not followed after righteousness, had attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith: but that Israel, who had followed after the law of righteousness, had not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? (says he:) Because they sought it not by faith, but, as it were, by the works of the law: for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone^t.” So it will be with all who will not submit to the righteousness of faith. If they would “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they should never be ashamed:” but if, through an ignorant zeal for the law, they will not embrace the Lord Jesus Christ as their only hope, they must inevitably and eternally perish. This is the reason that, in going through this epistle, we bring the matter before you in such various points of view, and with such an earnest desire to fasten a conviction of it on your minds: and we entreat all to bear in remembrance the importance of the subject, and not to give sleep to their eyes or slumber to their eye-lids, till they have embraced the Lord Jesus Christ with their whole hearts, and made him “all their salvation and all their desire.”]

3. Are the promises any more against the law, than the law is against the promises?

[The law, as has been shewn you, is subservient to the promises, and was given on purpose to make us more earnest in apprehending them, and more simple in relying on them.

^s Rom. x. 3.

^t Rom. ix. 30—32.

So the promises in return secure obedience to the law; as St. Paul has said, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law^u." To this truth the whole Scriptures bear witness. "The grace of God which brings salvation, teaches us obedience^x;" and the faith that apprehends that salvation, secures it; for it "works by love," and "purifies the heart," and "overcomes the world." The state into which we are brought by the promises, precludes a possibility of our living in any wilful sin^y: it would be contrary to the very idea of our being servants of Christ, to render service to that which he so abhors. A spiritual man cannot endure the thought of so grievous an inconsistency^z. On the contrary, the promises afford him encouragement to aspire after universal holiness, because, whilst they set him free from all slavish fears, they assure him of a constant supply of grace and strength proportioned to his necessities^a. Hence, apprehending and living upon the promises, he will "cleanse himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God^b." Let this then appear in all our lives: so shall it be seen beyond all contradiction, that, though we build not on our works, we diligently perform them; and that the doctrine we profess is in truth "a doctrine according to godliness."]

^u Rom. iii. 31.^x Tit. ii. 11, 12.^y Rom. vi. 1—7.^z Rom. vi. 15, 16.^a 2 Cor. xii. 9.^b 2 Cor. vii. 1.

MMLXIX.

BENEFITS AND OBLIGATIONS OF BAPTISM.

Gal. iii. 27—29. *As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

TO enter fully into these words, the whole scope of the Apostle's argument should be duly considered. He has been insisting upon justification by faith alone, without the deeds of the law. This, to a Jew, was a most unpalatable doctrine, because it set aside the observance of all those ceremonies which had been ordained of God under the Mosaic dispensation. Hence many, after they had embraced the faith of

Christ, were still zealous for the law; and desirous of blending the law with the Gospel, as a joint-ground of their hope before God. Persons of this stamp had come among the Galatian converts, and had perverted the minds of many. Hence the Apostle, in this Epistle to the Galatians, expostulates with those who had been drawn aside, as having acted a most foolish and unreasonable part. “O foolish Galatians! who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?” He then proceeds to reason with them: ‘Have you not had amongst yourselves an evident proof and demonstration that the Gospel which I preached to you is true? The Holy Spirit set his seal to the truth of it, by his miraculous operations: but did he ever, in one instance, so confirm the doctrines opposed to it^a? Besides, with my doctrine agree the declarations of God himself; who says, that as Abraham was justified by faith, so by the same faith the whole heathen world shall be justified^b. But to the law no power of justifying is ever ascribed. *That* can do nothing but condemn: and it is only by pleading what Christ has done and suffered to deliver us from its curse, that any one of us can ever escape its curse, and obtain the blessings which are accorded to us by the Abrahamic covenant^c.’

To make this matter clear, he illustrates it by a well-known fact. ‘If,’ says he, ‘a covenant be made between men, it cannot be disannulled, except by the consent of both the parties that are interested in it. But Abraham, and all his believing seed throughout the whole world and to the very end of time, were interested in the covenant made with Abraham; whereas, in the covenant made four hundred and thirty years afterwards on Mount Sinai, none but Abraham’s *natural* descendants, and a very small portion even of them, were interested: and therefore this latter covenant can never supersede the former, or in any

^a ver. 2—5.^b ver. 6—9.^c ver. 10—14.

degree change its gracious provisions^d. In truth, the Mosaic covenant, so far from superseding that which had been made with Abraham, was intended rather to be subservient to it, and as a schoolmaster, to educate persons for it, and to bring them to a participation of its blessings^e. Consequently Christ, with whom, as well as with Abraham, the covenant of grace was made^f, having now come, and fulfilled in our behalf all that was required by that covenant, we, of whatever nation we be, have nothing to do but to believe in him; and then all the blessings of the covenant will become ours. Being united to him by faith, we shall be regarded as one with him; and be made partakers of all the benefits which he, as our Great Surety, has purchased for us^g.

This is, in few words, the general scope of the Apostle's argument in the chapter before us. But, for the more particular elucidation of the words of my text, I will shew,

I. What, *in the judgment of charity*, we possess, the very instant that we profess ourselves to be Christ's—

The covenant of grace made with Abraham and his seed is that under which we live: and we are admitted to a participation of its blessings now by baptism, as, previously to the coming of Christ, men were by circumcision. To be “baptized into Christ,” is to be baptized *in the name of* Christ; and by baptism, to be initiated into his religion. As the Jews were “baptized unto Moses” by passing through the sea and being sprinkled with its spray, and so became *his* disciples; so do we, by descending into the water in baptism, or by being sprinkled with it in the name of Christ, become the followers of Christ^h. Now, respecting persons baptized into the religion of Christⁱ, the Apostle says, “They have put on Christ.”

^d ver. 15—18.

^e ver. 19—24.

^f ver. 16.

^g ver. 25—29.

^h 1 Cor. x. 2. See the Greek, which is precisely the same as in my text, and determines, with exactness, the meaning of my text.

ⁱ Compare Matt. xxviii. 19. and Mark xvi. 15, 16.

And what are we to understand by this? I conceive it refers, not to any change of garments which was made by persons at their baptism; for we hear of no such custom in the apostolic age: but it refers to the change of garments which was made by Aaron, and all succeeding priests, at the time of their consecration to the priesthood. The persons consecrated to the priesthood were first washed with water, and then had the coat, and the robe, and the ephod, and the breast-plate, put upon them; and were girded with the curious girdle of the ephod; and the mitre, with the holy crown upon it, was put upon their head. "Thus were the priests of old consecrated unto God^k:" and thus are we, in our baptism, made "a holy priesthood" to the Lord^l. But, though this gives us a general idea of what is meant by putting on Christ, it falls very far short of the full import of the expression, as used in my text. In another place, the expression is used to signify the putting on *the moral character of Christ*^m: but here it signifies the putting on of *his complete and entire character*; so that God may view us altogether *as in him*, clothed with his righteousness from head to foot, and transformed into his image in righteousness and true holinessⁿ.

Now, this the Apostle represents as taking place at our baptism. And, not content with so representing it in *some* cases, or in *many*, or in *most*, or *generally* in *all*, he speaks as if this change were *absolutely universal*, without any exception: "*As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.*" Here is, if I may so express myself, a distributive individuality; by means of which he comprehends every baptized person separately, and without any exception. Yet, in this very epistle, he speaks of some of whom "he stood in doubt^o." How, then, are we to understand this? The Apostle here spoke *according to the judgment of charity*; even as

^k Exod. xxix. 4—9.

^m Rom. xiii. 14.

^o Gal. iv. 20.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 9. Rev. i. 6.

ⁿ Eph. iv. 23, 24.

he does in many other places, where he addresses whole collective bodies, and Churches, as “saints, and faithful in the Lord^p.” And I cannot but think, that in this passage we have a complete justification of the language used by our reformers in the baptismal service. After having baptized any child, we are there taught to return thanks to God in these words: “We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy Church.” Now this strikes many as too strong; and they scarcely know how to utter it before God. I grant it is strong: but is it stronger than the Apostle’s language in my text? No, not in the least: and if it be said that the prayer in our Liturgy refers to each individual separately; I answer, so does the Apostle’s language also: for it is equivalent to saying to every individual of the Christian Church, ‘Have *you* been baptized? then *you* have put on Christ: for *as many as* have had the sacrament of baptism administered to them, have been made partakers of this benefit.’

But, strong as this language is, the Apostle is not content: for he goes on to say, that, in the attainment of these exalted privileges, there is no distinction of persons whatsoever; none arising from nation, or rank, or sex; *as there was, to a great degree, under the legal dispensation*: “There is neither Jew nor Greek,” says he; “there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female: but ye are all one in Christ Jesus:” so that, inasmuch as all, without exception, are baptized into one body in Christ; all, without exception, enjoy the benefits conferred by that ordinance.

Let me not, however, be mistaken. I do not mean to say that the Apostle’s words are to be taken *strictly* in this unlimited extent: but I mean to say, that he spoke thus, *according to the judgment of*

charity, respecting those who had been consecrated to God in baptism; and that our reformers studiously followed the Apostle, both in his spirit and language: and that, if we do not complain of the Apostle, or refuse to read his words, neither ought we to complain of our reformers, or refuse to use their words; when their only fault has been, if fault it may be called, in adhering so closely to the example and the language of an inspired Apostle.

I make not these observations wantonly, to provoke controversy; but in a spirit of love, with a view to satisfy the minds of any, if such there be amongst us, who have been stumbled in any respect at the expressions referred to in our baptismal service. And I shall think my pains well bestowed, if I may produce in any scrupulous mind the peaceful conviction which the foregoing thoughts have imparted to my own bosom^a.

If it be thought that the foregoing observations are liable to abuse, they will be found effectually guarded by the Apostle himself, who proceeds to shew,

II. What *in reality* we possess, when once we become *really* Christ's—

“If we be Christ's, then are we Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Now, let us, for a moment, return to the Apostle's argument. He shews, that Christ being the Seed to whom the promises in the Abrahamic covenant were made, all who are in Christ must, of necessity, inherit those promises: and that, as Abraham partook of those promises simply by faith, whilst yet he was in an uncircumcised state, so all his believing posterity also are entitled to a participation of them simply by faith, without any legal observance whatsoever.

^a In this passage, precisely as we in our Baptismal Service, the Apostle uses *distributive individuality*. [If a person wish to prosecute this subject further, he may compare the first answer in our Catechism with Rom. ix. 4; where the Apostle's language is the evident ground-work of that which our Reformers have used.]

Now, by believing in Christ, we become perfectly one with Christ—

[This is affirmed in my text: “We are all one in Christ Jesus.” It is also frequently declared in other places. I will specify one, where the union which is formed with Christ in baptism is represented as equivalent to that which subsists between the head and members of the same body; so that the persons baptized are actually called by his very name, as being altogether identified with him: “As the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of that body, being many, are one body; so also is CHRIST;” that is, so also is *the Church of Christ*. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free” “We are indeed many members, yet are we but one body^r.” Thus it appears, that, inasmuch as we become one with Christ by faith in him, we become in and with him the seed of Abraham, and heirs of all the promises that were made to him.]

And being united unto Christ by faith, we need nothing to be superadded to us by the works of the law—

[The natural descendants of Abraham, *as such*, have no title to these benefits: for “all are not Israel who are of Israel; neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children;” for it was said to him, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called: that is, they which are the children of the flesh are not the children of God: but *the children of the promise are counted for the seed*^s.” Now, by union with Christ we become the children of promise, and consequently heirs of all that God has promised. But how is this union effected? It is effected simply by faith. No work of the law can contribute to it. Even if we were of Abraham’s natural posterity, it would avail us nothing: nor, if we were to keep the whole law, would it avail us any thing. We must believe in Christ, and by faith be made one with him; and then the benefits are ours: nor shall all the powers of darkness prevail to rob us of them. Only let these two things be remembered, and our whole argument will be clear. First, no want of external privileges can deprive us of these benefits; and next, no observances whatever can augment our title to them, if only we believe in Christ: for “if we be Christ’s, then are we Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”]

Now let me ADDRESS myself,

1. To those who are Christ’s *in profession only*—

^r 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13.

^s Rom. ix. 6—8.

[You perceive, that, as “baptized into Christ,” you profess to have “put on Christ.” Now, then, permit me to ask, have you ever felt your need of Christ? Have you ever been conscious of the nakedness of your soul by reason of sin; and of the utter insufficiency of the fig-leaves of your own righteousness to cover your nakedness; and of the indispensable necessity of your being clothed in Christ’s righteousness, in order to your acceptance before God? Have you, under a deep sense of your need of his righteousness, gone to him, and apprehended him, and put him on by faith? and does all your hope of happiness in the eternal world arise from this thought, that God views you, not as you are in yourselves, but as you are in Christ, clothed from head to foot with his unspotted robe, and *therefore* standing without spot or blemish in the sight of the heart-searching God? Let but conscience return a candid answer to these inquiries, and you will have a perfect insight into your real state before God. You will then see, that, though baptized into Christ, you have never really availed yourselves of your privilege to “put him on.” You are in the state of a widow, who, though entitled to a certain portion of the estate of her deceased husband, neglects to take out administration according to law: she cannot turn any part of the estate to her own account; and must perish with hunger, even as if she had no title whatever to the estate, if she continue to neglect the appointed means of coming to the possession of it. And so must you perish under the guilt of all your sins, if you neglect to put on Christ by faith, and to cover yourselves with the robe of his unspotted righteousness. You may be as observant of the law as ever Paul was in his unconverted state: but yet will you perish for ever, as he also would have done, if you apply not to Christ, that you may “be found in him, not having your own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in him.” As for your baptism, it will avail you nothing without this: for he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God†.] On the other hand, let me say, that if only you will believe in Christ, though you were the most ignorant of Gentiles or the most abandoned of sinners, you should be accepted in him, and be made partakers of all his blessings, both of grace and glory.]

2. To those who are Christ’s *in reality and truth*—

[I trust there are many such among you. And what shall I say to you? what but this? Survey the covenant

† Rom. ii. 28, 29.

which was made with Abraham, and all the promises contained in it; and say, 'All these are mine.' Survey all that Abraham ever possessed, or possesses at this moment at the right hand of God; and then say, 'As Abraham's seed, and Abraham's heir, I am entitled to all of this.' Go further still, and survey all that Christ himself ever enjoyed, or at this moment enjoys, as the promised Seed of Abraham, and the great Heir of all; and then say, 'All this also, so far as I am capable of enjoying it, is mine: God is my God, even as he is Christ's^u; and Christ's throne is my throne: Christ's kingdom is my kingdom; Christ's glory, my glory; for "the glory which God has given him, he has given me^x."

What then shall I do, to shew my sense of the benefits conferred upon me? This will I do, to the utmost of my power: I will "put on Christ:" I will put him on daily; so that God shall never see me but as I am in him, covered with the robe of his righteousness; nor shall my fellow-creatures ever see me but as possessing "the very mind which was in Christ^y." I will "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," even as a man puts on his garments^z; so that all who see me shall say that I resemble him. I will, God helping me, be "a living epistle of Christ, that shall be known and read of all men^a;" so that all may know how he walked when on earth, and how he wills that we should walk^b.

This, my beloved brethren, is the true way to prove yourselves Christ's believing people; and this will bring down to you a heaven upon earth.]

^u Gen. xvii. 7. with John xx. 17.

^x Rev. iii. 21. John xvii. 22.

^y Phil. ii. 5.

^z This is the precise import of Rom. xiii. 14. and refers to the moral image of Christ.

^a 2 Cor. ii. 2, 3.

^b 1 John ii. 6.

MMLXX.

THE TIME AND MANNER OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION.

Gal. iv. 4, 5. *When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*

THE advantages which we as Christians enjoy above the Jews are exceeding great. The Jewish Church was like an heir to a large estate during the

years of his minority : he has indeed bright prospects before him ; but at present he receives no more than what his guardians judge necessary for his use, and suited to his condition. “ He, in fact, differs nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all :” for he is altogether “ under the controul of tutors and governors, till the time appointed by his father,” whose possessions he is to inherit. We, on the contrary, are like the same person when arrived at full age, having perfect liberty from servile restraints, and entering into the complete enjoyment of the inheritance, to which by our Father’s will we are entitled. In this view St. Paul himself has illustrated the subject in the chapter before us. Having in the preceding verses described the state of the Jewish Church, he declares, in the words of our text, the superior privileges which, through the incarnation of the Son of God, we enjoy.

To bring the whole subject under your consideration, it will be proper to notice the *time*, the *manner*, and the *end* of our Saviour’s incarnation.

I. The time—

It may seem strange that, when God had promised to send his Son into the world, he should delay the execution of that promise four thousand years. But it does not become us to sit in judgment upon God’s proceedings ; it is sufficient for us to know that he cannot err. But, in relation to the point before us, we may observe, that the time when our Lord came into the world, was,

1. The time fixed in the Divine counsels—

[When the promise of a Saviour was given to our first parents, nothing was specified respecting the time. Hence Eve (as it should seem) imagined that her first-born child was he : for she named him Cain (which signifies *getting*) ; intimating, that “ she had gotten a man from the Lord,” or rather, that she had gotten *the* man, the Lord^a. Nothing seems to have been declared concerning the time of the Messiah’s arrival, till it was revealed to Jacob, that “ the sceptre should not depart from Judah, till Shiloh should come^b :” and

^a Gen. iii. 1.

^b Gen. xlix. 10.

it is remarkable, that a separate jurisdiction did depart from all the other tribes several hundred years before Christ's advent; but that Judah retained it, in a measure, even during the captivity in Babylon; and never completely lost it, till Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, and the whole Jewish polity was dissolved.

After the restoration of the Jews from Babylon, it was revealed to the Prophet Haggai, that the Messiah should come while that temple was standing; and by his presence in it should add greater glory to it, than the former temple, with all its magnificence and peculiar appendages, possessed^c.

But that which marked the period with most precision, was the prophecy of Daniel, which declared, that in seventy weeks (of years), or four hundred and ninety years, from the command given by Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem, the Messiah should be cut off^d. This determined the time with such accuracy, that the expectation of the Messiah's advent was very general among the Jews, when our Lord made his appearance upon earth.

Thus the fulness of the time was come, because it was the time ordained by God in his eternal counsels, and made known to the world by his holy prophets.]

2. The fittest time—

[If our Lord had come into the world at an earlier period, several valuable purposes would either not have been answered, or not in so eminent a degree. By the delay, there was abundant proof given, how little could be done *by reason, with all its improvements; or by the law, with all its sanctions; or by the most signal judgments and mercies.*

Reason had attained its summit. The learning of Greece and Rome had left nothing to be added for the perfecting of the human intellect. Yet what did all their boasted philosophy effect? Were the habits and dispositions of men meliorated? Was the dominion of sin broken, or virtue made more generally prevalent throughout the world? Read the account which St. Paul gives of the heathen world; and judge^e.

God has been pleased to republish his *law*, in a way calculated to awe his people, and secure their obedience to it. He had enforced it with the most solemn sanctions; and had himself written it on tables of stone, in order that it might not any more be mutilated and forgotten, as it had been when left to the uncertainty of oral tradition. And did this succeed? No. The Jew had nothing to boast of above the Gentiles. St. Paul draws their character also, and shews that they, with

^c Hagg. ii. 7, 9.

^d Dan. ix. 24, 25.

^e Rom. i. 22—32.

all their advantages, were as far from God and righteousness as the heathen themselves^f.

The interposition of the Deity had also been displayed in a visible series of *mercies and judgments*, correspondent to the moral conduct of his people. Not only had thousands and tens of thousands been struck dead at a time for some great offence, but even the whole nation were sent into a miserable captivity for seventy years. On the other hand, their restoration from captivity had been so miraculous, as evidently to bear the stamp of Omnipotence upon it. These things did lead the Jews to renounce idolatry: but how far they prevailed to introduce general habits of piety and virtue, may be seen in the awful unanimity which obtained among them in rejecting and crucifying the Son of God.

No fitter time therefore could have been chosen for the sending of this last remedy, than when all other remedies had been fully tried, and their inefficacy had incontrovertibly appeared.]

The next thing to be noticed respecting the incarnation of Christ, is,

II. The manner—

Though Christ was God equal with the Father, yet in his mediatorial capacity he acted as the Father's Messenger or Servant. The Father sent his Son,

1. "Made of a woman"—

[This expression would have been superfluous if applied to any mere man; but, as applied to the Lord Jesus, it is peculiarly important. Our adorable Saviour was not born like other men; but was formed in the womb of a pure virgin by the operation of the Holy Ghost: and this was necessary on many accounts.

If Christ had been born in the ordinary way of generation, he would have been comprehended in Adam's natural posterity, and would therefore have been involved in the same curse as all others are on account of the first transgression: for "in Adam all died;" and "through his disobedience many were made sinners," even all who were represented by him as their covenant-head. Moreover, he would have been corrupt, as all others are; for "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" But, not deriving his existence from man, he could not be ranked among the sons of Adam; and, being formed by the immediate agency of the Holy Ghost, he was perfectly immaculate.

^f Rom. ii. 17—29.

This miraculous mode of conception and birth was farther necessary, in order to fulfil the prophecies: for in the very first promise that announced God's gracious intentions to the world, it was said, that "the Seed of the *woman* (not of the man, but of the woman) should bruise the serpent's head^g." It had afterwards been more plainly declared, that "a virgin should conceive, and bear a Son, whose name should be called Emmanuel," God with us^h.

Hence the expression in the text marks at once, that Christ was fitted for his mediatorial office; and that he is the very person fore-ordained from the foundation of the world to sustain and execute it.]

2. "Made under the law"—

[Not being represented by Adam, and not inheriting his defilement, Christ was not under the *curse* of the law: but, being born of a Jewish parent, he was under the *authority* of the law, as well the ceremonial as the moral. The law was to him, as it was to Adam in Paradise, a covenant of life and death. The covenant made with Adam was for himself and all his natural posterity: that which was made with Christ, was for himself and all his spiritual seed. Now, Adam, by violating the covenant, had entailed a curse on all his descendants. To remedy this evil, two things were to be done: the curse due to us was to be endured; and a new claim to heaven was to be established for us. For these two purposes Christ was fitted, when he was sent into the world: He was sent "made of a woman only," that, not being himself obnoxious to the curse of the law, he might bear the curse for us; and that, fulfilling all the demands of the law, he might "bring in an everlasting righteousness," which should be imputed to us, and placed to our accountⁱ.

If we attend to the various circumstances of his life and death, we shall find that he actually fulfilled the law in every particular. He fulfilled the *ceremonial* law both *actively* and *passively*: *actively*, by submitting to circumcision, by attending the stated feasts, and by complying with the Mosaic ritual in all its parts: he fulfilled it also *passively*, by accomplishing every thing which was there prefigured, and by exhibiting in himself the substance of every thing which the Mosaic ritual had shadowed forth^k. He fulfilled also the *moral* law, obeying it in its utmost extent, insomuch that not a spot or blemish could be found in him. In short, as "it became him to fulfil all righteousness," so he did fulfil it; and, being "made under

^g Gen. iii. 15.

^h Isai. vii. 14. Matt. i. 23.

ⁱ Dan. ix. 24. Rom. iii. 21, 22.

^k Col. ii. 17.

the law," he resigned not his breath till he could say in reference to all that the law required of him, "It is finished¹."]

The incarnation of our blessed Lord remains yet further to be considered, as it respects,

III. The end—

We may say in general terms that he was sent,

1. To redeem us from guilt and misery—

[The Jews alone were under the *ceremonial* law, and therefore they alone can be said to have been delivered from the yoke which that law imposed upon them. But the whole human race are under the *moral* law: they are under it as a covenant, which, having been once violated, denounces only its curses against them, without affording them the smallest hope of mercy^m. Now the Lord Jesus Christ came to redeem us from the law; and to establish a new covenant for us, by embracing which we are released from the covenant of works, and brought into a perfectly new state. This new covenant offers us life upon totally different terms from those which were proposed under the old covenant: the old covenant said, "Do this and thou shalt live:" the new covenant says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be savedⁿ." The very instant we lay hold on the new covenant, the old covenant is cancelled with respect to us: It cannot *condemn* us, because its penalties have been inflicted on our Surety: It cannot *command* us, because we are not under its jurisdiction. *As a rule of duty*, it retains its authority; but, *as a covenant*, it is altogether abrogated and annulled^o. Thus through the incarnation and death of Christ we are redeemed from the condemnation we have merited by our past transgression of the law, and from all obligation to stand or fall by the terms which that law prescribes.]

2. To exalt us to happiness and glory—

[Our blessed Lord had yet higher ends in view when he became incarnate. He came to restore us to all the blessedness from which we had fallen. By creation we were children of God: but, when sin entered, that relation ceased; and we became "children of the devil." This being our state, Christ came, that through him we might again return to the family of God. Though we are by nature strangers and aliens, we may receive through him the adoption of sons, and be regarded by God as dear children. We are expressly assured that this

¹ John xix. 30.

^m Rom. iii. 19. Gal. iii. 10.

ⁿ Rom. x. 5—9. with Acts xvi. 31. ^o Gal. ii. 19. Rom. vii. 1—4.

privilege is given to all without exception who believe in Christ^p. What is implied in this privilege, the Apostle states in the two verses following the text. He specifies both the *present* and *future* benefits of this adoption. *In this world*, instead of having any occasion to dread the wrath of God, we may look up with filial confidence to him, “crying, Abba, Father;” and may expect from him all that care, and love, and mercy which are suited to the relation of a father. *In the eternal world*, we shall be raised to such dignity and glory as no words can express, no imagination can conceive. “Being sons, we are heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ:” and whatever God or Christ possess either of happiness or glory, shall be possessed by us, according to the degree of our meetness for it, and the measure of our capacity to enjoy it.

“This honour have all the saints;” and that they might enjoy it in its fullest extent, was the design of God in sending his dear Son into the world.]

INFER—

1. The folly of adhering to the law—

[Men, in seeking salvation by the works of the law, have no idea what folly they are guilty of. What should we think of a man, who, when offered an estate which had been purchased for him at an immense price, should decline accepting it as a gift, and should prefer the making a stipulation to earn it, and that too by labours which a thousand men were not able to perform? Yet that were wisdom when compared with a rejection of the Gospel, and a seeking of salvation by the works of the law; because it is impossible for fallen man to be saved by the covenant of works: and, if Christ had not redeemed us from that covenant, we must all have perished together. Will any of you then be so mad as to adhere to that covenant, now that God has sent his own Son to redeem you from it? You think indeed by this to shew your zeal for good works; but it is a zeal which is not according to knowledge^q; and a zeal which will only leave you, as it left the self-righteous Jews, destitute of any part in the salvation of Christ^r.” We would not discourage your zeal for good works: we only wish to give it a right direction. Obey the law; but obey it with proper views. Renounce your dependence upon it as a covenant of works, and seek salvation by faith in Christ. Then shall you receive that spirit of adoption, which will make the service of God to be perfect freedom, and afford you ample scope for your most active exertions.]

2. The blessedness of receiving the Gospel—

^p John i. 12.

^q Rom. x. 2, 3.

^r Rom. ix. 30—32.

[What an astonishing transition does that soul experience, which is delivered from the terrors of Mount Sinai, and brought into "the liberty of the children of God!" From being harassed with the dread of God's wrath, and impelled by servile fears to irksome, unsatisfying, ineffectual labours, how delightful to behold the face of a reconciled God and Father, to feel a holy boldness and confidence before him, and to anticipate the joys of heaven! This is not a picture which is drawn by a warm imagination: it is a reality; it is the experience of thousands; it is in a greater or less degree known to all who believe in Christ. Seek then, my brethren, this happiness. You can easily conceive the difference between the labours of a slave under the lash of the whip, and the services which an affectionate child renders to an indulgent parent: you can see that even *at present* their states are exceeding different. Such is the difference between those who are under the law, and those who embrace the Gospel. But what will be the difference *hereafter*? "*Now*, believers are the sons of God: but it doth not yet appear what they shall be: but we know that, when they shall see Christ in glory, they shall be like him, for they shall see him as he is^s." Let all of us then believe in Christ, that "we may see the good of his chosen, and rejoice in the gladness of his nation, and give thanks with his inheritance^t!"]

^s 1 John iii. 2.

^t Ps. cvi. 5.

MMLXXI.

THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION.

Gal. iv. 6. *Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*

IF we were to judge by the exterior of men's lives, we should be ready to think that Christianity had done but little hitherto for the world: for it must be confessed, that, of those who profess our holy religion, the greater part differ very little from heathens. But then it must be recollected, that there is much wrought by the Gospel, which, though to a certain degree visible in its effects, is seen clearly only by God himself. There is in every one, who receives the Gospel aright, a change, both in *his state* before God and in the *secret habit of his mind*. From an enemy

to God, he is made a friend and a son ; and from serving God by constraint, as a slave, he comes to him with a spirit of adoption, as a beloved child. Now, the *acts* of this person may be, in many respects, what they were before ; so that one who looks only on the outward appearance, shall see no great difference between him and others : but God, who has made all this difference, discerns it ; and appreciates the obedience that is paid to him, not according to the mere act, but according to the motive or principle from which it flows. Now, taking this view of Christianity, we must say, that it has been, and yet is, productive of incalculable good : for still, as well as in the apostolic age, God begets sons to himself by means of it ; and “when they are made sons, he pours forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

In illustration of these words, I will shew,

I. The relation which every true Christian bears to God—

Every Christian, from a rebel and an enemy, becomes “a son.”

In this we have the advantage of those under the law—

[The Jews, though God’s peculiar people, were not his sons, but his servants : or, if we call them his sons, (for doubtless he was a Father unto them,) still they were only as “minors, who differed very little from servants.” They were under severe and burthensome restraints : they had but a small portion of their inheritance in actual enjoyment ; and they performed their duties altogether in a servile spirit^a. But under the Gospel we are regarded as *adult* sons, who are freed from those restraints, and enjoy a spirit of liberty in the whole of our life and conversation. This is not only affirmed in our text, but taken, as it were, for granted, and assumed as the ground of those further blessings which are bestowed upon us.]

And to this we are introduced by our Lord Jesus Christ—

^a ver. 1—3.

[He has redeemed us from that bondage in which we were once held. Though, as Gentiles, we have never been bound by the ceremonial law, we have, of necessity, been subject to the moral law, which is equally binding on every child of man: and under that we have been exposed to the most tremendous curses for our violations of it. But the Lord Jesus Christ, by his obedience unto death, has both fulfilled its demands, and suffered its penalties, for us; and has thus freed us from it *as a covenant*, and has brought us into a better covenant, the covenant of grace. Hence it is that we receive a Spirit of adoption: for, in this better covenant, God grants all the blessings of salvation to us freely, whether we be Jews or Gentiles; and, as soon as ever we believe in Christ, admits us into his own family, as his beloved children^b. *Thus* are we brought to God in the relation of sons, and have all the benefits of children conferred upon us.]

But that which we are chiefly to notice, concerning the Christian, is,

II. The privileges, which, by virtue of this relation, he enjoys—

The Spirit of Christ is sent forth into his heart—

[The Holy Spirit is here, as in many other passages of Scripture, called, “the Spirit of Christ^c.” Not that we are to conceive of the Godhead as consisting of persons of unequal majesty and glory; for the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are in glory equal, and in majesty co-eternal. But each person in the ever-blessed Trinity sustains a distinct office in the economy of redemption; the Father sending the Son to work redemption for us; and the Son sending the Holy Spirit to apply that redemption to us. It is in their official character alone that this subordination consists; and, agreeably to this distinction, we must go to the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit; and expect blessings from the Father in the very channel by which we gain access to him^d. Now, if we go to God in this way, he will send his Holy Spirit into our hearts as a Spirit of adoption; giving us thereby,]

1. Liberty of access to him—

[The Jews dared not to draw nigh to God within the limits that were assigned them, whether on Mount Sinai, or in the temple. But, at the death of our blessed Lord, the vail of the temple was rent in twain, to intimate to us, that now there

^b This the Apostle carefully marks, by using the Hebrew word for Father, as well as the Greek; shewing thereby, that whether we be Jews or Greeks, we are placed on the same footing by the Gospel.

^c Rom. viii. 9. 1 Pet. i. 11.

^d Eph. ii. 18.

was “opened for us a new and living way into the holiest of all,” even for every child of man^e; and that the nearer we came to God’s mercy-seat, the more certainly we should find acceptance with him.]

2. Boldness to spread our wants before him—

[To the Jews there were many things which, however they might desire them, they dared not ask. Korah and his company were consumed for affecting the priesthood, and presuming to offer incense to the Lord. But to our requests no limit whatever is assigned, provided they be in accordance with God’s will, and have a tendency to advance his glory. With these obvious and necessary distinctions, we may “ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us:” however wide we open our mouths, God will fill them. If we are “straitened at all, it is in our own bowels:” we are not straitened in God: for he is both “able and willing to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can either ask or think.”]

3. Confidence in his care—

[A servant may *hope* for kind attentions from his master in a day of necessity, though still to a very limited extent; but a son is assured, that whatever relief his father can afford him shall be readily bestowed. His necessities may be great, and his troubles of long continuance; but he has no fear that the tender sympathy of his father shall fail. Now this is what “a Spirit of adoption” gives to every true Christian. “He knows in whom he has believed; and that he is both able and willing to keep that which he has committed to him.” He knows not, indeed, *how* God shall interpose for him, or *when*: but he is persuaded that “God will never leave him nor forsake him;” but “will make all things work together for his ultimate good,” and “cause his light and momentary afflictions to work out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Hence, without doubting of a happy issue to his afflictions, “he casts his care on God, who careth for him.”]

4. An assured expectation of his inheritance—

[Of this a servant can have no hope. But a son knows that he has a title to his father’s inheritance; and that his father has assigned it to him in his will. But stronger far is the Christian’s assurance of his title to heaven, and of his ultimate possession of it. God has promised *to* him, not grace only, but glory also; and has begotten him to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved

^e Heb. x. 19—22.

in heaven for him, who is also kept by the power of God for it. And who shall rob him of this inheritance? "Who shall separate him from his Father's love?" He can look on the innumerable hosts of men and devils, and boldly defy them all. The Spirit of adoption, which enables him to "cry, Abba, Father," assures him of the victory, and is to him a pledge and earnest of his future glory.]

OBSERVE—

1. How little is the true nature of Christianity understood amongst us!

[Men conceive of Christianity as a *system of restraints*; or, at best, as a *system of doctrines and duties*. But, though it partakes of all these things, it is in reality a *system of privileges*: it "takes men from the dunghill, to set them among princes;" and "translates them from the kingdom of darkness, into the kingdom of God's dear Son." Contemplate Christianity in this view; as taking "strangers and foreigners; and not only bringing them into the household of God," but making them "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." Well might St. John express his wonder, saying, "Behold, what manner of love is this wherewith the Father hath loved us, that we should be called the sons of God!" Truly, this is the light in which we should view the Gospel; and this is the end for which we should receive its gracious declarations.]

2. What enemies to themselves are the unbelieving world!

[It is to bring you to this very blessedness that we preach unto you the Gospel of Christ. For this we set forth all the wonders of redeeming love. For this we invite you to come to Christ, and believe in him. It is not to make you melancholy, as foolish people imagine; but to make you blessed in the enjoyment of your God and in the possession of his glory. Why then will you put these things far from you? Why will you pour contempt upon them, as if they did not deserve the attention of any considerate man? Be assured, that, in rejecting the salvation offered you in the Gospel, you are your own enemies: you rob yourselves of happiness, of which not all the universe could deprive you; and plunge yourselves into misery, which all the universe would be unable to entail upon you. Tell me, is it so light a matter to be sons of God, that you will despise it; and to have a sweet sense of this sealed by the Holy Spirit upon your soul, that you will

reject it? Ah! who can make you amends for the loss of these privileges; or console your minds, when they are irrecoverably placed beyond your reach? Be wise, I pray you; and seek these blessings, ere they are for ever hid from your eyes.]

3. How earnestly should we hold fast the blessings thus accorded to us!

[Great as these blessings were, the Galatian Christians were soon prevailed on to abandon the possession of them, and to go back again to the bondage in which they had formerly been held. And the same disposition remains in us. We all have a measure of servility in our minds; and are ready to bind on ourselves burthens from which Christ has made us free. Legal hopes, legal fears, legal endeavours, are quite in consonance with our depraved hearts. But do not dishonour our blessed Lord by indulging such propensities as these: strive rather to get rid of them, and stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free. Then will you find the service of your God to be perfect freedom; and the enjoyment of him, on earth, a foretaste of that complete fruition of him that awaits you.]

MMLXXII.

MINISTERS LABOURING IN VAIN.

Gal. iv. 11. *I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.*

MINISTERS are, in the Scriptures, compared to husbandmen. Now, no one can doubt, for a moment, what the object is of those labours which the husbandman pursues. Whether he prosecute the initiatory work of manuring and plowing his ground, or cast upon it, and harrow in, the seed, every one knows that he looks to the harvest, as the compensation of his toil: and so far as the produce abounds, he considers himself as well repaid; but so far as it fails, he regards himself as having laboured in vain. Thus a faithful minister rests not satisfied with having discharged his duty: he looks for the effects of his labours in the conversion of souls to God, and in the salvation of his fellow-men. If, in these respects, his ministrations are crowned with success, "he sees of all his travail, and is satisfied." But

if the people to whom he ministers remain in a state of ignorance, or, whilst they profess to have received the Gospel, they walk unworthy of it, he feels constrained to adopt the language of St. Paul, and to say, "I am afraid of you, that I have bestowed upon you labour in vain."

Now I propose to shew you,

I. When a minister may be said to have "laboured amongst his people in vain"—

This complaint he may justly utter,

1. When they *cleave to the law, as a ground of their hopes*—

[What is the one great object of ministers, but to bring men to Christ, that through him they may find reconciliation with their offended God? In this view, their ministry is called "the ministry of reconciliation." But, in order to effect this great work, they must detach persons altogether from their dependence on the law. Men, by nature, are born under the law: and they invariably look to their obedience to the law as the ground of their hope towards God. But, as it is impossible for fallen man ever to render to the law that perfect obedience which it requires, God has given him a Saviour, through whom he may obtain a perfect righteousness, fully commensurate with all the demands of law and justice. But, in order to his obtaining an interest in this, every other ground of hope must be renounced. He must be saved wholly, either by works or by grace. The two grounds of hope cannot exist together. If a man attempt to blend them together, even in the smallest possible degree, he will fail: the slightest dependence on his works will altogether invalidate the work of Christ, and make void all that he has done for the salvation of men^a. If, therefore, a person still practise any works of the law, in order to obtain, either in whole or in part, justification by them, all the labour that has ever been bestowed on him will be in vain. St. Paul said to the Galatian converts, "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years." And on this he grounded the complaint in our text. The observance of days was not evil in itself: it was only evil, as arguing an affiance in the law, and a consequent departure from the faith of Christ. But this being the proper construction to be put upon it, he regarded it as a dereliction of the Gospel; and therefore expressed his fears, that all the labour he had bestowed on them had been in vain.]

^a Gal. v. 2, 4.

2. When they *depart from the law as the rule of their life*—

[The law, though set aside by the Gospel as a ground of our hope, remains, in all its pristine force, as a rule of life. It must be obeyed, and obeyed from the heart too, as much as if we were to obtain justification by it: nor is there any other standard by which our lives must be regulated, in order to please and honour God. The Gospel proposes nothing new in respect of morals. It adds to our *motives* for obedience, and gives us a more complete *pattern*: but it enjoins nothing beyond the requirements of the law. The law enjoins us to love God with *all* our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbour *as ourselves*: and beyond that we cannot go. The Gospel informs us, that “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself;” and, consequently, all the faith and love which we are taught to exercise towards God, we exercise towards our adorable Emmanuel; and all the love which we manifest to man, we manifest it *for Christ’s sake*, and *in conformity to the pattern which he has set us*: but *beyond the demands of the law we cannot go; nor short of those demands are we allowed to stop*. If, therefore, we see any one relaxing in his obedience to the law, we declare to him, that “faith has not in him its perfect work.” His heart must be right with God: he must labour to “walk in all things as Christ walked:” he must, if not in absolute attainment, yet in desire and endeavour, be “holy as God himself is holy, and perfect as his Father which is in heaven is perfect.” There must be no sin, though dear as a right eye or useful as a right hand, retained: and if we see a man proposing to himself any lower standard than this, we must, of necessity, “stand in doubt of him;” and fear, so far as he is concerned, that we have bestowed on him labour in vain^b.]

Let me, then, point out to you,

II. The awful state of a people that are so circumstanced—

Truly,

1. Their responsibility is great—

[It is here taken for granted, that the Gospel has been faithfully preached to them. And I hope this may be said with respect to you, my brethren. Yes; you will bear me witness, that “Jesus Christ has been evidently set forth crucified among you, even as it were before your eyes^c.” Now, our blessed Lord said to his hearers, that “if he had

^b Mark ix. 43—47. with Jam. ii. 10.

^c Gal. iii. 1.

not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but that now they had no cloak for their sin^d." What, then, must I say to you? You well know, that "many prophets and kings have in vain desired to hear and see the things which have been made familiar to you; and that, at this moment, many would account themselves "blessed," if they could possess the privileges which you enjoy^e: but you cannot but know also, that on these grounds a proportionable responsibility attaches to you. Yet, is there not reason to fear, that many of you are still so ignorant both of the Law and of the Gospel, as not to understand their respective offices, and not to render to them that peculiar honour which they severally demand? Is there not reason to apprehend, that many have never yet come to Christ, as helpless, hopeless sinners; discarding every other ground of hope, and glorying in him as all their salvation and all their desire? Yet, if you have never been brought to this, O! think how much you have to answer for! If the fate of Chorazin and Bethsaida was made worse than that of Tyre and Sidon, yea, than that of Sodom and Gomorrah, by their abuse of the Gospel, judge, I pray you, what the criminality of those is, who, like you, have slighted all the blessings of salvation, which have been so freely offered, and so fully set before you? Jehovah himself appealed to his people of old: "Judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard: what could have been done more for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? And wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes^f?" The same appeal I must, in Jehovah's name, make to you also. The various means of grace you have enjoyed in rich abundance; and they must be accounted for as talents which you were bound to improve.]

2. Their danger is imminent—

[It is an awful truth, that "the word preached, if it be not a savour of life to those who hear it, proves to them a savour of death unto their death^g." In fact, it is sometimes sent to a people in judgment, rather than in mercy: "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed^h." *No less than six times is that passage quoted in the New Testament*, to shew us the immense importance of it, and to put us on our guard, lest it be realized in us. We are warned, that "the earth

^d John xv. 22.

^e Luke x. 23, 24.

^f Isai. v. 3, 4.

^g 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^h Isai. vi. 9, 10.

which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and *is nigh unto cursing*; whose end is, to be burnedⁱ." Ah! think "how nigh the curse may be!" and how tremendous it will be, when it shall fall upon you! You know what was said to the barren fig-tree; "Cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground?" And you also, though spared for the present, through the intercession of your Lord, must soon expect that doom, if you continue to make no return for all the labour bestowed upon you^k.]

APPLICATION—

1. Improve, then, the opportunities which are yet afforded you—

["The seed is sown on your hearts: look to it, that it be not taken away by Satan, ere the process of vegetation has taken place at all. Beware too, lest, if it spring up, it be not soon withered for want of root; or, if it continue to grow, it be not choked by thorns, so as not to bring forth fruit to perfection." Prepare your hearts, by meditation and prayer, before you come to the house of God: and when you have received the good seed, harrow it in by a repetition of the same process: and bear in mind, that you are to requite the labours of cultivation, by bringing forth fruit, according to the measure of divine grace bestowed upon you^l.]

2. Look forward to your great account—

[It is but a little time, and both you and I must give account of our stewardship: I, of my ministrations; and you, of your improvement of them. If I have omitted to warn you, and you perish through my neglect, woe be unto me; for "your blood will be required at my hands^m." But if I have been faithful to my high calling, then shall I have the joy of presenting you to God; saying, "Here am I, and the children thou hast given meⁿ." O blessed day, if I may "have many of you as my joy and crown of rejoicing in that day^o!" On the other hand, how painful is the thought, that against those who have not improved the opportunities afforded them, I shall "appear as a swift witness^p;" and every sermon I have ever delivered will testify against you, to your confusion^q. But let us hope that such shall not be the result of our meeting, my beloved brethren: no; let me entreat you to give

ⁱ Heb. vi. 7, 8.

^k Luke xiii. 6—9.

^l Matt. xiii. 18—23.

^m Ezek. xxxiii. 8.

ⁿ Isai. viii. 18.

^o 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

^p Mal. iii. 5.

^q Deut. xxxi. 21.

yourselves unto prayer;—for *me*, that the blessing of God may be upon my labours; and for yourselves, that “ye may not receive the grace of God in vain^r.”]

^r 2 Cor. vi. 1.

MMLXXIII.

THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN ZEAL.

Gal. iv. 18. *It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing.*

MEN act with energy in things that are agreeable to them. But while some are earnest in the support of religion, others are no less active in opposing it. This was the case with the false teachers, who sought to exclude the Apostle, that they might extend their own influence in the Churches of Galatia^a. But the Apostle justly condemns them, and recommends energy in a better cause.

The text will lead us to consider,

I. The nature of Christian zeal—

Zeal is a strong affection of the mind; and is good or evil, according to the object towards which it is directed, and the manner in which it is exercised. It is more frequently in Scripture spoken of as evil^b: but there is also a Christian zeal; which is distinguished by two things:

1. It is good in its object—

[Some spend their zeal in things that are in themselves *sinful*^c: and others on things *indifferent*^d: but the Christian's zeal is directed to what is *good*: he maintains with steadfastness the faith of the Gospel^e; and engages heartily in the practice of its precepts^f.]

^a ver. 17. ^b Acts v. 17, 18. and xiii. 45. and xvii. 5.

^c Phil. iii. 6. John xvi. 2.

^d Mark vii. 3, 4. And those amongst ourselves who raise fierce disputes about human ordinances.

^e He follows the injunctions and examples of the apostles, in opposition to what is improperly called candour. Jude, ver. 3. Gal. i. 8, 9. 2 John, ver. 10.

^f Tit. ii. 11, 12, 14.

2. It is uniform in its operation—

[The zeal of many is only *occasional* and *partial*^g; but the Christian's is *uniform* and *universal*^h: it has respect to every duty; stimulating to private and personal, as well as public and official, duties. It does not, however, lay the same stress on trifles, as on the weightier matters of the law; but proportions its exercise to the importance of the things about which it is engaged.]

That such a zeal is truly praiseworthy, will appear, while we point out,

II. Its excellence—

The text pronounces it to be “good;” and not without reason; for,

1. It is that which stamps a value on all other graces—

[What are the most excellent graces without *this*? Faith is only a cold assent; hope, a mere doubtful expectation; and love, a general good-will, or rather, an empty name. The best of services without *this* is a worthless formality. But, on the other hand, the poorest and meanest service accompanied with this, is pleasing to God. The widow's mite surpassed the rich donations of the wealthyⁱ; nor shall a cup of cold water lose its reward^k.]

2. It is by that alone that we can honour God—

[Lukewarm services declare, in fact, that God is not worthy of any better testimony of our esteem; and hence it is that they are so odious in his sight^l. But, if we act with zeal, we silently, yet powerfully, proclaim to all, that God is worthy of all the love and honour we can render him. God himself testifies, that if we observe the sabbath in a becoming manner, we honour him^m: and the same is true of every other duty we perform.]

3. By that we may ensure success—

Exertion does not always command success in an earthly race or warfare. But in spiritual things none can fail who exert themselves with zeal *in God's appointed way*. “They

^g It shews itself only in things that require little or no self-denial.

^h It “affects us always” not as a feverish, but a vital, heat; not as a meteor, but as the sun.

ⁱ Mark xii. 41—44.

^k Matt. x. 42. 2 Cor. viii. 12.

^l Rev. iii. 16.

^m Isai. lviii. 13.

shall know, who follow on to know the Lordⁿ;" and to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, shall eternal life assuredly be given^o. Many *seek* to enter into the kingdom of heaven, and are not able: but none ever yet *strove* in vain^p.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have no zeal at all in religion—

[Whatever zeal men exercise in their worldly callings, few, alas! are much in earnest about religion. The natural man has no *heart*, no life or spirit in any thing he does for God. But will the heart-searching God be pleased with mere formal services? We ourselves do not accept them favourably at the hands of a fellow-creature; and shall God from *us*^q? If we would ever be approved of God, let us follow that injunction, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might^r."]

2. Those who have declined in their zeal—

["When iniquity abounds, the love of many will wax cold." And are there none amongst us who have "left off to behave themselves wisely;" none who have lost their first love? Let the solemn charge addressed to such persons in the primitive churches, be duly considered, and obediently regarded^s: for "it were better never to have known the way of righteousness, than, having known it, to turn from it^t."]

3. Those who feel the importance and necessity of zeal—

[Good as zeal is in a good cause, it may become pernicious both to ourselves and others, if it be not properly directed. There is "a zeal without knowledge^u," which may easily be mistaken for Christian zeal. Let all then who would serve God acceptably, endeavour to have their zeal well regulated, both with respect to its objects, and the manner of its operation. Let their own sins, rather than the sins of others, and their own duties, rather than those of others, be the *first* objects of their regard. Let not a proud, bigoted, or vindictive spirit be cherished by them under the cloak of zeal^x; but let every duty to God or man be tempered with meekness, humility, and love. Let nothing bear such a preponderance in their mind as to make any other duty appear light and

ⁿ Hos. vi. 3.

^o Rom. ii. 7.

^p Luke xiii. 24.

^q Matt. xv. 8, 9.

^r Eccl. ix. 10.

^s Rev. ii. 4, 5. and iii. 19.

^t 2 Pet. ii. 21.

^u Rom. x. 2.

^x Luke ix. 54.

insignificant. Let the world, the family, and the closet, have each its proper portion of attention: and, with increasing ardour, let them follow Christ, whose “meat was to do the will of him that sent him^v.”]

^v John iv. 34.

MMLXXIV.

A MINISTER'S CHIEF WISH FOR HIS PEOPLE.

Gal. iv. 19, 20. *My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.*

THE pastoral relation is described in the Scriptures by images well calculated to convey an idea of anxious concern, and fond endearment. St. Paul sometimes speaks of himself as “the father” of his converts, as “having begotten them through the Gospel^a,” and sometimes as their mother “travailing in birth with them.” Corresponding with these images, are the feelings of a minister’s heart in reference to his people. If he see them in a sick and dying state, he will not be indifferent about their recovery, but will, with parental tenderness, administer such instruction and advice as may conduce to their welfare. There are too many indeed, who, from an affection of candour, hope well concerning the states of all their people. But the faithful minister dares not to act on such delusive principles; he knows the danger to which the unconverted are exposed, and the awful responsibility of his own office; and therefore he will faithfully discharge his duty, and “divide to every one the word of truth,” consoling or reproving them as occasion may require.

In the words before us, we see,

- I. What a minister chiefly desires on behalf of his people—

^a 1 Cor. iv. 15.

As a parent rejoices to see his children prospering in bodily health and worldly circumstances, so a minister is glad to see his people free from sickness and distress. He is thankful too, if he behold an outward reformation among them, and a diligent attendance on ordinances, and the establishment of family prayer, and a decided approbation of the Gospel record. But all this falls very far short of his wishes. He never is satisfied respecting them, until he have a clear evidence that "Christ is formed in them,"

1. As a vital principle in their hearts—

[Whatever they may have, or whatever they may do, they have no spiritual life, till "Christ liveth in them"^b. If "Christ dwell not in their hearts, they are no other than reprobates^c." "Christ is the life" of the soul, as much as the soul is the life of the body^d. He animates all our faculties; and without him they are as incapable of spiritual exertions as a breathless corpse is of performing the functions of a living body^e. "Christ in us is the hope of glory^f;" and all profession of religion, without the in-dwelling of his Spirit in our souls, is only like the motion and re-union of the dry bones, before God has breathed into them a principle of life^g.]

2. As a visible character in their lives—

[Concerning the quickening of a soul, we can judge only by its actions. While therefore a minister desires that his people may be really alive to God, he looks for the fruits of righteousness as the proper evidence of their regeneration. He expects to find "Christ formed" in their tempers, their spirit, their whole conduct. He is not contented to behold such virtues as may be found in heathens: he longs to see in them a victory over the world, a supreme delight in God, an unwearied exercise of all holy and heavenly affections. He is satisfied with nothing but an entire "renovation after the Divine image^h," and a "walking in all things as Christ walkedⁱ."]

But as this change is rarely so satisfactory as might be wished, we proceed to shew,

^b Gal. ii. 20.

^c Eph. iii. 17. 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^d Col. iii. 4.

^e John xv. 5.

^f Col. i. 27.

^g Ezek. xxxvii. 7—10.

^h Eph. iv. 24. Col. iii. 10.

ⁱ 1 John ii. 6.

II. When he has reason to stand in doubt of them respecting it—

In every place where the Gospel is faithfully preached, there are some of whom the minister may enjoy a full and confident persuasion of their acceptance with God. But there will also be some respecting whom he must feel many anxious fears. This will be the case, wherever he sees them,

1. Fluctuating in their principles—

[The Galatians had been warped by means of Judaizing teachers, and turned from the simplicity of the Gospel^k: and on this account the Apostle “feared he had bestowed upon them labour in vain^l.” It is much to be regretted, when godly persons are distracted by “matters of doubtful disputation.” They always, in a greater or less degree, “suffer loss” by means of it, because their attention is divided, and the energy of their minds, in reference to their more important concerns, is weakened. But when, as in the case of the Galatians, their doubts relate to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, their danger is exceeding great. They shew that they are only “children, when they are tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine^m,” and their want of establishment in the faith gives reason to fear lest they should be finally overthrownⁿ.]

2. Unsteady in their conduct—

[Such was the state of the Galatians. When the Apostle was with them, they were “zealously affected with good things^o,” but now he was absent from them, their love to him, and to the truth itself, had cooled; and their zeal was turned into a very different channel^p. No wonder then that “he travailed in birth with them again,” since they betrayed such fickleness of mind. Thus, wherever we see a zeal that is only *occasional in its exercise*, or *partial in its operation*, we may well “stand in doubt of” such persons. If the ardour of their minds decay, or be called forth chiefly about the non-essentials of religion; if they are more occupied about church-government than about the government of their own tongues; and more offended at the miscarriages of their brethren than at the evils of their own hearts; if they are violent about doctrines, and remiss in practice; there is but too much reason to groan and

^k Gal. i. 6, 7. and iii. 1.

^l ver. 9—11.

^m Eph. iv. 14.

ⁿ Heb. xiii. 9.

^o ver. 18.

^p ver. 14—17.

tremble for them. They are “like a cake not turned,” (doughy on one side, and burnt up on the other,) alike unacceptable both to God and man^q. And it is to be feared that they will prove at last to be only hypocrites and apostates^r.]

Such doubts must needs be painful in proportion to the regard we feel for our people’s welfare, and the importance of the object which we desire on their behalf. Every minister therefore should inquire,

III. By what means he may most effectually promote it in them—

Waving other things which might be mentioned, we shall notice two, which more immediately arise from the text; namely,

1. A personal intercourse with them—

[The evils arising from *the non-residence of ministers* is incalculable^s. But a minister may reside in the same place with his people, and yet profit them very little, if he have not a private acquaintance with them, and frequent conversations with them on the concerns of their souls. His public ministrations cannot be sufficiently particular to enter into the views and feelings of all his congregation. Errors may become inveterate in their minds, before he knows any thing about them. We do not impute blame to the Apostle for not abiding with the Galatians; because his commission was to preach the Gospel throughout the world: but we are well assured, that the Judaizing teachers would never have gained such an ascendancy over them, if he had abode with them as their stated pastor. His presence would have been more advantageous to them than a hundred letters; on which account he says, “I desire to be present with you now.” Let ministers then avail themselves of this advantage; and the people give them every opportunity of access to them.]

2. A suiting of his address to their respective cases—

[When the Apostle was with the Galatians, he comforted and encouraged them. Now in this epistle he warned and reproved them: and if, by conversing with them, he could restore them to their former state, he would gladly “change his voice,” and speak to them again in terms of approbation

^q Hos. vii. 8.

^r Matt. xxiii. 23, 24.

^s This should be fully stated, if this text were the subject of a discourse preached before the Clergy.

and confidence. He would adapt himself to the state of every individual, distinguishing the different degrees of criminality that were found in each, and "giving to each his proper portion of consolation or reproof, as the season" or occasion required^t. In this way ought ministers to address their people. The speaking only in a general manner leaves the greater part of our hearers in an ignorance of their real state. We should descend to men's business and bosoms. We should "warn the unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, and support the weak^u." We should answer the objections, solve the doubts, and rectify the errors, of our people; and, by suitable instructions, confirm them in the faith. It is in this way only that we can enjoy much satisfaction in them, or expect to have them as "our joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of judgment^x."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those of whom we stand in doubt—

[Think us not uncharitable on account of the fears we express: "we are jealous over you with a godly jealousy^y." If we felt as we ought, we should be pained and distressed as a woman in her travail, while we see any of you in a doubtful state. We must desire to see in you what we know to be essentially necessary to your salvation: and while we behold any allowed and habitual deviations from the Gospel, whether it be in principle or practice, we must warn you of your danger. Would you have us tell you that you are safe, when we are doubtful whether Christ be formed in you? When we observe one proud, another passionate, another covetous, another unforgiving, another censorious, another formal, would you have us satisfied respecting you? Surely our anxiety about you is the best proof of our love: and we earnestly entreat you all "to judge yourselves, that ye may not be judged of the Lord^z."]

2. Those of whom we entertain no doubt—

[Where shall we find persons of this description? Where? alas! in every place. Can we stand in doubt about the swearer, the Sabbath-breaker, the whoremonger, the adulterer? Can we stand in doubt of those who live without secret prayer; of those who never felt their need of having Christ formed in them, nor ever endeavoured to conform themselves to his example? No: infidels may stand in doubt; but they who believe the Bible cannot doubt at all^a; the state of all such

^t Luke xii. 42. ^u 1 Thess. v. 14. ^x 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

^y 2 Cor. xi. 2. ^z 1 Cor. xi. 31. ^a Gal. v. 19—21. Eph. v. 6.

persons is as clear as the light at noon-day; and their inability to see it, only proves how awfully “the god of this world hath blinded their eyes.” We must declare unto you, brethren, and would speak it with tears of pity and of grief^b, that, if you die before that Christ has been formed in you, “it would have been better for you that you had never been born^c.”

But there are others also of whom we cannot doubt; I mean, the humble, spiritual, devoted “followers of the Lamb.” Of these even infidels entertain no doubt; because, upon their own principles, they who are most virtuous are most safe. But they have also the word of Jehovah on their side: and, if we were to stand in doubt of them, we must doubt the states of all the holy Prophets and Apostles, whose faith they follow, and whose example they imitate. No: in such as them are found “the things that accompany salvation^d.” We congratulate them therefore on the safety and happiness of their state: and “we are confident that He who hath begun the good work in them, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ^e.” They may indeed have sometimes doubts and fears in their own minds: but we say unto them, in the name of the Most High God, “Fear not, little flock; for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom^f.”]

^b Phil. iii. 18.^c Matt. xxvi. 24.^d Heb. vi. 9.^e Phil. i. 6.^f Luke xii. 32.

MMLXXV.

SARAH AND HAGAR TYPES.

Gal. iv. 22—24. *It is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bond-maid, the other by a free-woman. But he who was of the bond-woman was born after the flesh; but he of the free-woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory.*

THERE are many things in the Old Testament which we should have passed over as unworthy of any particular notice, if their use and importance had not been pointed out to us in the New Testament. Such is the occurrence which is here referred to; and which the Apostle found to be of singular use to illustrate the nature of the Gospel covenant. He was endeavouring to counteract the influence of those Judaizing teachers, who had perverted the

faith of the Galatians : with this view he expostulates with those who had turned aside to a compliance with the ceremonial law ; and shews them, by an allegorical explanation of the history before us, that the law itself might have taught them a very different conduct.

To understand the allegory in all its parts, we must attend carefully to the main scope of it, which is, to shew, that, as both Sarah and Hagar brought forth children to Abraham, yet those children differed widely from each other ; so the old and new covenants bring forth, as it were, children to God ; but there will be found, between their respective offspring, such a difference as may well deter men from returning to the covenant of works, and make them resolutely adhere to the covenant of grace.

We may observe then a corresponding difference between the two women and their offspring, and the two covenants and their offspring,

I. In their nature—

[Ishmael, the son of the bond-woman, was born according to the common course of nature : but Isaac, the son of the free-woman, was born in a preternatural way, through the more immediate agency of God himself.

Thus they, who are under the law, have nothing but what they derive in a natural way from their parents. They may possess strong intellects, and discover many amiable qualities ; but whatsoever they have, it is all carnal ; no part of it is spiritual ; their reason is carnal reason ; their affections are carnal affections. But they, who are under the covenant of grace, are “ born of God ;” their faculties are all renewed ; their views and desires are spiritual ; they have “ put off the old man, and put on the new ;” yea, they are partakers, as far as flesh and blood can be, of a divine nature^a. Hence they are called “ new creatures ;” and are as much distinguished from the mere natural man, as light is from darkness, or Christ from Belial^b.

This is the first point of distinction which the Apostle himself notices ; and it is confirmed by the declaration of our Lord, that whatsoever is born of the flesh is carnal ; whereas, that which is born of the Spirit (as all who embrace the new covenant, are) is spiritual^c.]

^a 2 Pet. 1. 4. ^b 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15. ^c ver. 23. with John iii. 6.

II. In their disposition—

[Ishmael, being born of the bond-woman, was himself a slave; and therefore must, of necessity, have a servile spirit: but Isaac, the child of promise, felt all that freedom of spirit which an affectionate and beloved child is privileged to enjoy.

Thus the children of the old covenant are “brought forth to bondage.” They may obey in many respects the will of their Father; but they are invariably actuated, either by self-righteous hopes, or slavish fears. Whatever they do for God, it is “grudgingly and of necessity:” his work is irksome to them; or, if at any time it be pleasant, their satisfaction arises from pride and self-complacency, and not from any delight they feel in his service. But the children of the new covenant are enabled to walk before God with holy confidence and joy. They serve him, not from fear, but from love; not that he *may* save them, but because he *has* saved them. Whatever they want, they make known their requests to him, assured that he will gladly do for them more than they can ask or think. Thus they maintain sweet fellowship with him, regarding him in all things, not as a master or a judge, but as a father and a friend.

This distinction too is marked by the Apostle, who says also in another place, that believers have not received the spirit of bondage *again* to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby they cry Abba, Father^d.]

III. In their conduct—

[Whatever outward conformity Ishmael might shew to his father's will, it is certain he was averse to it in his heart; for he persecuted Isaac on account of his superior piety, and derided him for claiming an exclusive right to his father's inheritance: but Isaac patiently endured the trial, “knowing in whom he had believed,” and that “He was faithful who had promised.”

Thus it is with all the children of the old covenant: they may obey the law in many points; but they do not really love it in any respect: on the contrary, they hate those, whose superior piety is a reproach to them, and who profess, that the children of promise shall exclusively inherit their Father's kingdom. “The *saints* and the *elect*” are with *them* terms not of respect and honour, but of mockery and derision. Our Lord teaches all his followers to expect this treatment, and to expect it on this very account from those, who are merely born after the flesh: “if,” says he, “ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not

^d ver. 24, 25. with Rom. viii. 15.

of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you^e." The children of the new covenant, in the mean time, meekly bear the cross; "being defamed, they entreat; being persecuted, they suffer it;" "committing themselves to him that judgeth righteously," and waiting the accomplishment of all his promises.]

IV. In their end—

[Ishmael, by his conduct, brought upon himself that very exclusion, which he had confidently supposed would never take place: and Isaac in due time inherited the portion, which, in dependence on God's word, he had professed to expect. Nor was the difference made merely through the partiality of the parents, but by the express order of God himself^f.

Thus shall they, who are under the law, be, ere long, banished from their Father's house. In vain shall they plead their *carnal* relation to God, and his people: they belong to a covenant that entails on them a curse, and not a blessing^g: and though they will not be persuaded of their danger now, yet will they find at last, that their confidence was presumption, and their hope vanity^h. On the contrary, they who are under the covenant of grace will inherit the promised land: their professions shall be vindicated, their expectations realized, their hopes accomplished: and to eternity shall they dwell with God, as monuments of his sovereign grace, and his unchanging faithfulness.]

We shall still continue to follow the Apostle in the
IMPROVEMENT of this subject. It is useful,

1. For examination—

[There cannot be a more interesting inquiry than this, Am I a "child of the bond-woman, or of the freeⁱ?" Nor will it be at all difficult to attain a satisfactory knowledge of our state, if we will but follow the clew, which this instructive allegory affords us. Let us ask ourselves then, What have I that nature cannot give, and that evidently marks me as born of God? Am I walking with God in the daily exercise of filial affection, accounting his service to be perfect freedom; or am I rendering him only a formal, partial, and constrained obedience? Do I look for heaven as the free gift of God through Jesus Christ; and expect it solely on the humiliating terms of the new covenant: or am I ready to take offence at

^e ver. 29. with John xv. 19.

^f Gen. xxi. 10, 12.

^g Gal. iii. 10.

^h ver. 30. with John viii. 35. and Matt. viii. 11, 12.

ⁱ ver. 31.

the electing love of God, and to deride as deluded enthusiasts those, who found all their hopes upon it? According to the answer which conscience gives to these queries, we may determine to which covenant we belong, and consequently, what our end must be when we go hence. Let our inquiries then be prosecuted with care and diligence, that, when our state is ascertained, we may tremble or rejoice, as the occasion may require.]

2. For direction—

[When we are brought under the covenant of grace, we are ever in danger of returning, as many of the Galatians did, to the covenant of works. We are prone to indulge self-righteous hopes, and servile fears. We are ready to confound the covenants by associating works with our faith as joint-grounds of our hope. But we must carefully avoid this, and watch against every approach towards it. We must “stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free; and never more be entangled with the yoke of bondage^k.” “Salvation is by grace through faith:” and “it is by faith, that it may be by grace.” The very instant we mix any work of ours with Christ’s obedience unto death, we fall from grace, and Christ becomes of no effect to us^l. Faith and works, *as grounds of our justification before God*, are opposites, and can no more be blended than light and darkness^m. Let us then hold fast the covenant of grace; and, in spite of all the persecution which our profession may bring upon us, let us “maintain our confidence, and the rejoicing of our hope, firm unto the end.”]

^k Gal. v. 1.

^l Gal. v. 2, 4.

^m Rom. xi. 6. with iv. 14.

MMLXXVI.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH MAINTAINED.

Gal. iv. 30. *Nevertheless what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bond-woman and her son: for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman.*

THE whole of God’s blessed word is highly instructive; and the Old Testament is an excellent preparative for the New. Indeed, those who are at all conversant with Scripture, expect to find mysteries in the ceremonial law, because that is confessedly a shadow of good things to come: but few

are aware how much is to be found in the historical parts of the Old Testament. We are, however, in no danger of erring, if we say that the sacrifice which Abel offered was not a mere accidental difference from that of Cain; but a typical exhibition of the sacrifice of Christ, to which, by faith, the pious offerer had respect^a. The preservation of Noah from the deluge, too, was not a mere mercy vouchsafed to himself and family; but a type of the benefit which we receive by baptism, which, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, saves us, (on a supposition we have received it aright,) as the ark, by its buoyancy, saved him from destruction by the tempestuous billows^b. In my text, there is reference to what we might have supposed to be an accidental disagreement in Abraham's family. We might naturally suppose that a wife and a concubine would not agree very well, and that their children would prove a source of mutual animosity. And so it turned out. But was this a mere accidental circumstance? No: it was permitted of God, in order to afford a good occasion for illustrating the covenant of grace, and the exclusive blessedness of those who adhered to it. You will perceive, that, in my text the words of Hagar are cited as a general rule of procedure in reference to the souls of men at the last day: and as they are somewhat intricate, and have at the same time an appearance of harshness and severity, I will endeavour to explain and vindicate the declaration contained in them.

Here is evidently a sentence denounced: and my endeavour shall be,

I. To explain the sentence—

To understand it aright, we must consider what was the subject in dispute between the Apostle and his opponents.

Some Judaizing teachers had drawn away his Galatian converts from the pure Gospel which he had taught them, to an affiance in the ceremonial law.

^a Heb. xi. 4.

^b 1 Pet. iii. 20, 21.

And, to bring them back to the truth of Christ, he shewed them, throughout this whole epistle, that salvation is by faith alone; and that to attempt to build our hopes in any measure on the law of works, was to “pervert the Gospel,” and, in fact, to introduce “another Gospel^c.” In confirmation of this sentiment, he proves, at large, that salvation is by faith only: he proves it, I say,

1. In a way of argumentative discussion—

[In the beginning of the preceding chapter, after reminding them that through the preaching of faith, and not by any works of the law, they had obtained the miraculous influences of the Holy Spirit^d, he reminds them of *the way in which Abraham was justified*. This was by faith, as the Gospel preached to Abraham had foretold, in relation both to himself and all his spiritual seed: and, consequently, we must be saved in the same way as he^e — — He then proves the same from *the very terms in which the Law and the Gospel are promulgated*; the one requiring obedience, and the other faith; the one killing, and the other giving life^f — — He next adduces *the end for which Christ came into the world*. This was not to give men an opportunity of saving themselves by the law; but to redeem them, by his own death, from the curses of the law; and to open a way for the blessing which had been promised to Abraham to descend upon them through the exercise of faith^g — — From thence he leads them to the contemplation of *the covenant in which all the blessings of salvation were contained*. This covenant had been made with Abraham, four hundred and thirty years before the law was given to Moses; and in it, all the believing seed of Abraham were interested. Now, this covenant could never be annulled, except by the consent of all the parties contained in it. But a very small part of those who were interested in that covenant were present when the law was given. *That* was only given to Abraham’s children after the flesh: his spiritual children had nothing to do with it: and therefore to them is the covenant of grace as valid as ever; the publication of the law having made no difference in it whatever^h — — Here, supposing naturally that his opponent would ask, “*Of what use then the law was?*” he proceeds to shew, that it was not given in order to establish any thing in opposition to the Gospel, but to

^c Gal. i. 6, 7.

^d Gal. iii. 2, 5.

^e Gal. iii. 6—9. All the verses quoted from this chapter and the next should be *cited* at length.

^f Gal. iii. 10—12. ^g Gal. iii. 13, 14. ^h Gal. iii. 15—18.

operate in subserviency to the Gospel; shewing men their need of it; and, like a schoolmaster, disciplining them for the grateful reception of itⁱ— — — and, consequently, now that the Gospel was fully revealed they should adhere to it, and look for acceptance solely by faith in it^k— — —

Here another *question* would arise. If the law was given to the Jews from the time of Moses, *in what state were those Jews?* Were they under the covenant of grace, or under the covenant of works? This he answers, by shewing that they were, in fact, under the covenant of grace; but yet, that they were like minors, who, whilst they are under age, differ but little from servants; not having any further enjoyment of their inheritance than their tutors and governors judged expedient for them. The time, however, being now come for them to enter on their possessions without restraint, he exhorts them to avail themselves of their liberty, and to walk no more as servants under bondage; but as sons and heirs, at perfect liberty^l— — —

Thus he has made it appear, that to live under bondage to the law, is to abandon our dearest privileges, and to violate our most solemn duties.

He now proceeds, after some suitable admonitions, to establish the same truth,]

2. In a way of allegorical illustration—

[In the history to which the Apostle refers, we should not, I confess, have seen any confirmation of the doctrine before us, if one who was inspired of God himself had not explained it to us. The transaction was this: Sarah, Abraham's wife, saw Ishmael, who was Abraham's son by Hagar, mocking her son Isaac. I apprehend that Ishmael derided Isaac, the younger son, for presuming to assert his title to his father's inheritance, in preference to him, who was the elder. Sarah, indignant at this behaviour, desired Abraham to expel Hagar and her son from his presence; saying, "Cast out the bond-woman and her son; for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." This was exceedingly grievous to Abraham, who felt a paternal love for Ishmael, and knew not how to part with him: but God himself confirmed the word that had been spoken; and enjoined Abraham to comply with his wife's request, since it was his determination that "in Isaac should Abraham's seed be called^m."

Now, in my text, we are told, that under this domestic occurrence a great mystery was veiled; for that it represented the distinction which should, to all eternity, be made between

ⁱ Gal. iii. 19—24.

^l ver. 1—7.

^k Gal. iii. 25—29.

^m Gen. xxi. 9—12.

those who cleaved to the covenant of works, and those who should lay hold on the covenant of grace. Hagar, a bond-woman, represented the legal covenant which should in due time be made on Mount Sinai; as her son Ishmael did the persons who should adhere to it: whereas Sarah, the married wife, represented the covenant of grace which had already been made with Abraham; and her son Isaac, the persons who should obtain an interest in that. Now, all persons, by nature, live under the covenant of works: but divine grace, where it operates, brings men under the covenant of grace: but all the former will be cast out from God; and the latter only will be partakers of his inheritance: and this distinction, we are told, was intended to be marked in the foregoing history. It may appear hard that such a distinction should ever be made: but made it shall be; God having declared this to be his sovereign will, his irrevocable decree: "Cast out the bond-woman and her son; for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free-womanⁿ."

Shall it be said, that this is too figurative and too recondite to add any weight to the preceding argument? I answer: This very circumstance, of its being so figurative and so recondite, gives it, in my mind, even greater weight than if it had been more plain and obvious; because it shews the unspeakable importance of that truth which it is brought to confirm. Had not the doctrine of justification by faith alone been of prime and indispensable necessity to every child of man, the Apostle would have been satisfied with establishing it by the train of argument which he has pursued: but, feeling that the rejection of it would prove fatal to the soul, he would omit nothing that could contribute to the enforcing of it on men's consciences, or the impressing of it on their minds.]

Aware, however, that, in the opinion of many, there are strong objections to this doctrine, I will proceed,

II. To vindicate it—

Against the very act itself, which is referred to in my text, we should have been rather disposed to object, if it had not been approved by God himself: we should have thought Abraham would have been better employed in pacifying the rage of Sarah, than in lending himself as an instrument to give it energy and effect. We should have thought it more worthy of him to use his influence for the purpose of allaying

ⁿ ver. 21—31.

domestic feuds, than to exert his authority for the rendering of them irreconcilable and eternal. But God commanded it; and therefore it must, of necessity, have been right, whether we can explain the reasons of it or not. And the doctrine which it was intended to shadow forth is right, whether we can understand it or not. To exclude from salvation all who adhere to the covenant of works, and to save those only who lay hold on the covenant of grace, may appear unjust, severe, and partial: but we will undertake to vindicate it from all that can be said against it, even from every charge,

1. Of injustice—

[If it had pleased God to deal with fallen man precisely as he had dealt with fallen angels, what injustice would he have done to any? Wherein did we merit an interposition in our favour more than they? Why, when we had violated the old covenant, should he enter into a new covenant, whereby we might be restored to his favour? Why, in order to render this measure consistent with his glorious perfections, should he give us his only-begotten Son to bear our sins, and to effect a reconciliation for us through the blood of his cross? Could we claim any such mercy at his hands? Or, could any one have had reason to complain, if no such mercy had been ever manifested? What injustice, then, can be done to any one, by confining mercy to this particular channel; and by requiring this new covenant in Christ Jesus to be made our hope and our plea, in order to our participation of its benefits? If we neither had, nor could have, any claim for mercy at all, we certainly can have no ground for complaint against God, for offering it in a way honourable to himself; and not granting it in a way of our own, that would reflect dishonour on every one of his perfections.]

2. Of severity—

[Though the shutting up of mankind to one only way of salvation may not be altogether *unjust*, yet it may be deemed somewhat *unmerciful* and *severe*; because it makes the rejection of that salvation a fresh ground of offence, and involves the offender in deeper guilt and misery than he could otherwise have incurred. But there is no undue severity in this. Let us suppose that God had acted towards the fallen angels as he has towards us. Let us suppose that he had sent his only dear Son to bear their punishment in his own person, and to work out a righteousness whereby they might be justified; and that

he had offered to restore to his favour every soul among them who would accept it in his Son's name; but would account all who should reject this overture as having added pride and ingratitude to all their other sins, and make them answerable for this their augmented guilt: is there one of us that would conceive God to be acting with severity towards them? Is there one who would not regard this as a stupendous effort of love and mercy, and acknowledge, that all who should despise this proffered mercy would deserve their appointed doom?

But there is another evil, which the despisers of the new covenant are guilty of: they invariably "mock" and deride those who found all their hopes upon it. They may not, indeed, be open scoffers, like Ishmael; but in their hearts they do of necessity "mock at the counsel of the poor, who putteth his trust in God^o." At this hour, as well as in the Apostle's days, it may be said, "As, *then*, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is *now*." How then can it be supposed that these contemners of God's people should be made heirs together with them? or, what severity can there be in refusing to them a portion which they so wantonly despise? The sentence, as denounced by Sarah, might have been deemed severe; but, as inflicted by the Most High God, it is merited in its full extent: for not even Satan himself was ever guilty of rejecting a Saviour, and pouring contempt on redeeming love.]

3. Of partiality—

[It is not *persons*, but *characters*, that are rejected of God: nor is it *from descent*, but *from choice*, that they fall short of the promised inheritance. In this respect, the parallel between the history and the doctrine established by it must be drawn with a due attention to all the circumstances, and must not be pressed too far. That was but a shadow; and we must distinguish between resemblance and identity. Ishmael shadowed forth those who are born after the flesh: Isaac represented those who are born after the Spirit: the former therefore characterizes all of us in our natural state; the latter, those who are regenerated by the Spirit of God. The latter, it is true, owe all their happiness to God's electing love: but the former can never ascribe their misery to any decree of absolute reprobation. The blessings of salvation are offered equally to all: the sins of all were equally borne by the Lord Jesus Christ in his own body on the cross: for "he is a propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of *the whole world*." "The Lord laid on him the iniquities of us *all*." Though born of the bond-woman, we may by grace become

children of the free: and, if we will not avail ourselves of this proffered mercy, the fault is altogether our own. In the parable of the Marriage-supper, the man who was cast out for not having on the wedding-garment, is represented as “speechless,” having not a word to utter in his own defence. He, it is true, was poor, and had been brought in suddenly from the highways and hedges: but a wedding-garment had been provided for him by the Master of the feast, and would have been given him if he had asked for it: and therefore he was justly punished for presuming to appear at table without it. So is salvation provided for every child of man: and he who neglects to seek it, must trace his failure to that neglect. The word of our blessed Lord is decisive upon this point: “Him that cometh unto me, I will *in no wise* CAST OUT:” if therefore the sentence be passed on us, “CAST OUT that son of the bond-woman,” we know whom alone we have to blame: the fault is not in God, as unwilling to save us; but in ourselves, as neglecting to seek salvation at his hands.]

From this subject we may SEE,

1. What is the one standard and test of truth—

[Men place reliance on their own opinions, and cite as authority the opinions of others. But man is weak and fallible. Even in relation to things which come most under his cognizance, he is apt to err: but in the things of God, which, of necessity, are so remote from his apprehensions, he is entitled to no confidence at all; seeing that he can know nothing, any further than it has been revealed to him by God himself. But it is in the sacred volume alone that we have any revelation from God; and therefore that must, of necessity, be the only standard and test of truth. “To the word and to the testimony,” says the prophet: “if men speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them^p.” Tell me not then, thou vain disputer, what thy sentiments are. “What saith the Scripture?” Thou imaginest that thou canst lay down laws for God, and tell how he shall regulate his proceedings in the day of judgment: but I must declare to thee, that “thy wisdom,” however great thou mayest imagine it, “is foolishness with God;” and that his counsel shall stand, whether thou wilt hear, or whether thou wilt forbear.]

2. On what ground our eternal destinies shall be fixed—

[I well know that men shall be judged according to their works. But we greatly mistake, if we suppose that our faith

shall not become a ground of decision, either against us or in our favour, as much as any other work. It is as much “a command from God, that we believe in his Son, as that we should love one another^a :” and our compliance with it must equally be made a subject of inquiry at that day. We may think it strange, perhaps, that God should take such matters into account in the final judgment: but, whatever opinion we may form respecting it, God will then say, “Cast out the bond-woman and her son: for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman.” It will not be found a matter of such indifference, then, whether we believed in Christ or not, and whether we embraced the covenant of grace. No: this new covenant contains all the wonders of Divine wisdom, and love, and mercy: and, if we flee not to it from the terrors of the broken law, and from the fallacious hopes which are engendered by pride, his sentence will come forth against us, to our irreparable and eternal ruin. Take ye care then, beloved, that ye deceive not your own souls. Examine diligently whose children ye are, and to which family ye belong. Renounce all dependence on your own works, and lay hold on the promises of God in Christ Jesus. So shall “you, like Isaac, be the children of promise^r ;” and with him be partakers of an everlasting inheritance.]

^a 1 John iii. 23.

^r ver. 28.

MMLXXVII.

LIBERTY OF THE CHRISTIAN.

Gal. v. 1. *Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

THE doctrine of justification by faith is inculcated throughout all the Holy Scriptures, even in parts where we should never have thought of looking for it. Not only was it fully and explicitly declared to Abraham; but it was allegorically set forth by his putting away of Hagar and her son Ishmael, and his constituting of Isaac his sole heir. This was intended by God to shadow forth to us that we cannot be saved by the legal covenant, the covenant of works; but that we must embrace, and be saved by, the new covenant, the covenant of grace^a. By the covenant

^a Gal. iv. 21—31.

of grace we are liberated from the bondage of the covenant of works; and “in this liberty it becomes us all to stand fast.”

We shall be led from these words to notice,

I. The Christian's privilege—

The Christian is a believer in Christ: and by his faith he is made a partaker of all that Christ has procured for him. He was formerly under the law; and by that law was condemned. As long as he continued under that law, he continued under the curse. But “Christ has freed him from that law^b,” and brought him to a state of perfect liberty.

1. By suffering the penalty due to his transgressions, he has released us from it—

[Christ became the Surety and Substitute of sinful man. Did we owe a debt which it was impossible for us to pay? He discharged it for us, even to the uttermost farthing. Were we under the curse of the broken law? “He became a curse for us^c,” and endured all that was due to our sins. Hence there remains “*now* no condemnation to us^d.” “If only we believe in Christ, we are justified from all things^e,” and “our sins are blotted out as a morning cloud.”]

2. By giving us faith, he has brought us into a better covenant—

[There is a new covenant, which is a perfect contrast with the old covenant. The old covenant cursed us for one transgression, and provided no remedy for us whatever: the new covenant provides for us all that our necessities can require—pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory. Into this covenant all are brought, who believe in Jesus. He therefore, by imparting faith to our souls, translates us from the one to the other; and both liberates from all the evils of the former, and conveys to us all the blessings of the latter. From the very instant of our believing in Christ, we cease to have any thing either to hope or fear from the covenant of works: we are dead to it, and it is dead to us: it is abrogated and annulled: and, like a woman released from her nuptial bonds by the death of her husband, we are at liberty to “unite ourselves to Christ, that through him we may bring forth fruit unto God^f.” Thus, “being made free by Christ, we are made free indeed^g.”]

^b Rom. viii. 2.

^c Rom. iii. 13.

^d Rom. viii. 1.

^e Acts xiii. 39.

^f Rom. vii. 4.

^g John viii. 36.

We may easily conceive, from hence, what is,

II. The Christian's duty—

Privilege and duty comprehend all that constitutes religion. In themselves they are widely different; but they are never to be separated from each other. Possessing this high privilege of freedom from the law, we are to “stand fast in it;”

1. Against the influence of false teachers—

[There were such among the Jews, who were extremely zealous in propagating their sentiments, and in endeavouring to subvert the faith of Christ. And such there are at this day. What is the whole system of popery, but an establishment of the covenant of works? It inculcates, in all its ordinances, the merit of good works, and teaches men to expect salvation by their works. And what do they who teach that we are justified by the act of baptism; and they who administer the Lord's supper to dying persons as a passport to heaven? I deny not the use or efficacy of the sacraments, when duly *received*: but, to teach men to rely on the mere administration of them, irrespective of the manner, and mind, and spirit in which they are received, is as fatal an error as ever was broached: it is nothing but popery revived amongst us. Against all such errors, by whomsoever they are inculcated, you must be on your guard. If Peter himself make such an use of a sacrament, he must be reproved, as a traitor to the cause of Christ^h: and “if an angel from heaven were to bring such a doctrine as that, he must be held accursedⁱ.”]

2. Against the devices of Satan—

[That great adversary is ever fighting against Christ; and endeavouring to “blind men, lest the light of Christ's glory should shine unto them^k.” But you must “resist him, steadfast in the faith^l.” It is impossible for you to be too much on your guard against his temptations. As he beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so will he, if possible, turn you from the simplicity that is in Christ^m.” He will, both by his emissaries and by his suggestions, pervert the Scriptures themselves, just as he did when he tempted Christ: but you must “take the sword of the Spirit, and the shield of faith,” and, “in the strength of Christ, resist him” to the uttermostⁿ; that you “may never be moved away from the hope of the

^h Gal. ii. 11—16.

ⁱ Gal. i. 8, 9.

^k 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^l 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.

^m 2 Cor. xi. 3.

ⁿ Eph. vi. 10—17.

Gospel^o,” or be induced to “make shipwreck of your faith in Christ^p.”]

3. Against the treachery of your own hearts—

[There is no evil whatever more deeply rooted in the heart of man than self-righteousness. It will assume in you ten thousand shapes. Sometimes it will put on the garb of holiness; and make you fearful of exalting Christ too much, lest you should depreciate and discourage morality. Sometimes it will assume the form of humility; and make you stand aloof from Christ because of your own unworthiness: ‘You are not good enough to come to him: he will never receive so vile a sinner as you.’ There is no end to the delusions which your own deceitful hearts will suggest, to sanction, in some degree or other, a dependence on your own works. But you must put away every thought that may interfere with the honour of Christ, to whom the glory of your salvation must be given, whole and entire, from first to last. It is altogether the purchase of his blood, and the gift of God for his sake: and it must be received, by every creature under heaven, “without money, and without price.” St. Paul tells you, that if you do the best act in the world with a view to augment your interest in Him, “he shall profit you nothing^q.” The least attempt of this kind will invalidate the whole Gospel^r: and therefore look well to yourselves, that ye “receive not the grace of God in vain.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are yet cleaving to the covenant of works—

[What works will ye ever do, that shall be effectual for your salvation? or what single act have ye ever done, that will bear the test of God’s law? O, think of your folly and your wickedness! your folly, in preferring bondage to liberty; and your wickedness, in so requiring the grace of Christ — — —]

2. Those who are enjoying the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free—

[Enjoy it, and be thankful for it — — — but “turn it not to licentiousness.” Shew, by your lives, that the Gospel is “a doctrine according to godliness:” and let the world see that, whilst you “contend earnestly for the faith delivered to the saints,” you are “careful to maintain good works.”]

^o Col. i. 23.

^p 1 Tim. i. 19.

^q ver. 2.

^r ver. 3, 4.

MMLXXVIII.

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS REPROVED.

Gal. v. 2—4. *Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law: ye are fallen from grace.*

ON matters of morality, men will permit us to speak with the utmost freedom; but, on points of faith, they would have us use none but the mildest possible expressions, lest we should appear dogmatical and severe. St. Paul, where moral offences had been committed, was lenity itself^a; but when the fundamentals of our faith were endangered, his energy rose even to intolerance. I mean not to say that *he* disregarded morality, or that *we* should think lightly of it: but I mean, that we ought to entertain far different thoughts about the leading doctrines of religion, than those which generally prevail. Hear the Apostle, when he found that some of the Galatian Church had been drawn from the pure Gospel to a reliance on the observances of the Jewish ritual: “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed^b.” I grant, that he, as inspired, was authorized to speak in terms that would be unseemly for one who is not under an infallible guidance: but, so far as our doctrines accord with those of the Apostle, we *may*, yes, and *must*, maintain them, with a measure of the firmness which he uses in the promulgation of them. The passage which we have selected for our meditation this day contains nothing but what must be affirmed by every servant of Christ. But who that reads it must not tremble, lest he be

^a 2 Cor. ii. 7. Gal. vi. 1.

^b Gal. i. 8, 9.

found in the predicament there referred to? That we may fully understand the mind of the Apostle, I will, with all possible plainness, state,

I. What was the conduct here reproved—

It was not the mere practice of circumcision—

[This was a rite which had been ordained by God himself; and the neglect of which had so incensed God against his servant Moses, that, if his wife Zipporah had not instantly, and without delay, performed the rite with her own hands, that favourite of heaven would have been destroyed^c. And though the ceremonial law was now abolished, the observance of this rite was innocent: for St. Paul himself, in condescension to the prejudices of the Jews, had circumcised Timothy; and in this very place, where he so decidedly condemns the observers of it, speaks of it as a matter of perfect indifference: “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith, which worketh by love^d.” It is clear, therefore, that it was not of circumcision, *as an act*, that he spake, when he declared it to be incompatible with an interest in Christ.]

It was self-righteousness to which the advocates of circumcision were strongly inclined—

[Circumcision, when first appointed of God, was given to *Abraham* as “a sign and seal of that righteousness which he possessed in his uncircumcised state,” and which he had obtained solely by faith^e. But the Jews had altogether perverted it from its original intention, and had made it a fundamental article of the *Mosaic* ritual: they regarded it as connected with the *Law*, rather than with the *Gospel*; and founded their hopes of salvation, in a considerable measure, on their observance of it. *This* it was which St. Paul so severely reprobated; because it undermined the Gospel itself, and led the people to look to the law for righteousness, which the Gospel alone could impart. Nor was it without just reason that he so strongly guarded them against this error: for it obtained very generally amongst the Jews; and was the great stumbling-block over which they fell, to the utter destruction of their souls^f.]

That we may see how circumcision could by any means be so injurious to their souls, I will proceed to shew,

^c Exod. iv. 24, 25.

^e Rom. iv. 11.

^d ver. 6. and again, Gal. vi. 15.

^f Rom. ix. 30—33. and x. 2, 3.

II. Wherein the evil of it consisted—

1. It was a recurrence to the law—

[So the Apostle interprets it: “As many of you as are justified by the law.” This shews, that the Apostle viewed the *act* as performed in order to their justification before God: and such was really their end in performing it. There were many who insisted upon it as still obligatory upon all: and maintained, that “except men were circumcised, they could not be saved^g.” And it was St. Paul’s firm opposition to this tenet that so greatly incensed the Jews against him. If he would have yielded to them in this one particular, they would have laid aside their hostility against him, and have left him at liberty to make as many converts as he could. But “he would not give place, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the Gospel might be kept inviolate.” And to those who wished to represent him as still favouring their sentiments, he appealed: “If I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased^h.” Viewing, then, this rite as a recurrence to the law for salvation, he declared to every person who submitted to it, that he “became a debtor to do the whole law:” for if the law was obligatory in one part, it was in all: and, if they looked for salvation by obedience to any law whatever, whether ceremonial or moral, they must go back to the covenant of works altogether, and stand or fall by that. But *this* would be to involve themselves in inevitable and eternal ruin; since “it was written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them:” and, consequently, in going back to the law, they must bring down all its curses upon their souls. This, then, was one reason why it was wrong to practise circumcision in the way they did.]

2. It was a renunciation of the Gospel—

[All who had been baptized into the faith of Christ had professed to accept salvation as the free gift of God for Christ’s sake. But, in going back to circumcision, and insisting upon that as necessary to salvation, they did, in fact, declare that they considered the work of Christ as incomplete, and as insufficient for their salvation, without this work of the law super-added to it. All therefore who had imbibed this error were “fallen from the grace” of the Gospel altogether. They thought, indeed, to combine the law with the Gospel; but this was impossible. Salvation must be wholly of the one or the other: works and grace, as foundations of hope before God, were absolutely contrary to, and inconsistent with, each other:

^g Acts xv. 1.

^h ver. 11.

as the Apostle says, "If salvation be by grace, it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace: but if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more workⁱ." Would they, then, be content to forego all hope by the Gospel, and to abandon as worthless all the promises of grace? This was, in fact, their conduct, whilst they thus placed their reliance on this abrogated rite: and the folly of such conduct once seen, must deter them, for ever, from the prosecution of it.]

But we are yet further taught by the Apostle,

III. What was, and must in all cases be, the issue of it—

"Christ would become of no effect to them," and "would profit them nothing." Never, to all eternity, would they derive any benefit from him,

1. As their atoning Sacrifice—

[He died indeed for sinners, and offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world: but, in renouncing him, and going back to the law, they cut themselves off from all participation of the benefit: so that, as far as they are concerned, "he died altogether in vain^k."]]

2. As their great High-priest—

[For his people he is gone within the vail, there to make continual intercession for them: and through his intercession their peace is maintained with God. But never does he make mention of their name; never prefer one request in their behalf. If he were once to bring their case before his Father, it would be rather to "make intercession *against* them;" and to say, 'How long dost thou, O my Father, forbear to execute vengeance on those ungrateful creatures?' "How long dost thou not judge, and avenge my blood upon them^l?"]

3. As their Federal Head and Representative—

[To those who are united to Christ by faith, he is, under the new covenant, what Adam was to his posterity, under the old covenant. "In Adam, all" his natural posterity "died:" and "in Christ all" his spiritual children "are made alive^m." But those who return to the law, renounce the covenant of grace, and go back to the covenant made with Adam in Paradise; according to the tenour of which they shall be justified or condemned. Having no other representative than Adam, "in whom they have sinned," they have no one through whom

ⁱ Rom. xi. 6.

^k Gal. ii. 21.

^l Rev. vi. 10.

^m 1 Cor. xv. 22.

they can obtain any better title than what they have derived from him, or any other portion than what is entailed upon them as his descendants.]

4. As their Head of vital influence—

[Believers in Christ derive from Him all that they need for life and godliness, as branches of the living vine. But those who, in any measure or degree, transfer to the law their dependence, become as branches that are broken off, and that derive from Him no benefit whatever. To their impotence they are left; and as destitute of all spiritual good, they perish.

What a fearful thought is this! But let me dwell somewhat upon it, in a way of more direct]

APPLICATION.—See, I pray you,

1. How indispensable to our happiness is an interest in Christ—

[The Apostle represents the being without any profit from Christ, as the sum of human misery. And so, indeed, it is: for what can he possess who has no part in Christ? He may have wealth and honour in the richest abundance; but he has no life, no hope in this world, no portion but misery in the world to come — — — Can you reflect on this, my brethren, and not desire an interest in Christ? My brethren, seek him, lay hold on him, “cleave unto him with full purpose of heart;” and let no consideration under heaven induce you for a moment to draw back from him — — —]

2. What need we have to examine the state of our minds towards him—

[The persons who laid so great a stress on circumcision little thought what evils they were bringing on their own souls: and it is highly probable that they thought the affirmations of the Apostle needlessly severe. But this very circumstance rendered it the more necessary that he should deal faithfully with them, and declare to them the danger to which they were exposed. And so it is, when we declare the danger of self-righteousness, we are thought harsh and uncharitable. But we must declare, and “testify to every one” who relies on the works of the law, or blends any thing whatever with the merits of Christ, that he makes void the whole work of Christ, and cuts himself off from any part in his salvation. Examine yourselves, therefore: for self-righteousness is deeply rooted in the heart of man; and it has many specious pretexts for its actings. But be on your guard against it, and watch against it in every form; and determine, through grace, that you will henceforth trust in nothing, and “glory in nothing, but the cross of Christ.”]

MMLXXIX.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH.

Gal. v. 5. *We, through the Spirit, wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.*

THE object of St. Paul, in this epistle is, to maintain and establish the doctrine of justification by faith alone, without the deeds of the law. This doctrine had been assailed and controverted by Judaizing teachers, who had gained such influence in the Church, as to draw multitudes after them, and to intimidate even the Apostles themselves. We are told that Peter, through fear of the circumcision, dissembled, and drew Barnabas also, his friend and fellow-labourer, into a participation of his crime. St. Paul, with becoming zeal, set himself to stem the tide. He felt for the honour of God, whose Gospel was thus perverted; and for the welfare of immortal souls, whose salvation was endangered; and, without partiality, he rebuked Peter in the face of the whole Church; shewing that all mixture of the Law with the Gospel was a fatal error; and that all who would be saved must seek salvation wholly and exclusively by faith in Christ.

Having concluded his argument, he enforces the truth he had established; and declares, that all who were under the influence of the Spirit of God would wait for the hope of righteousness, not by works, but by faith alone.

The words before us will lead me to shew,

I. To what every true Christian looks for justification before God—

The context makes known to us the Apostle's views—

[The energy of the Apostle on this subject is such as must, on no account, be overlooked. He declares, in opposition to the Judaizing teachers, that the blending of the Law with the Gospel, in any respect, would make void all that Christ has done and suffered for us; that it would bring us back altogether to the covenant of works, which promised

nothing but to *perfect* obedience; and that it was, in fact, an utter renunciation of the Gospel, and a contempt of all the grace contained in it. "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you: whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace." Now, of all works that could be performed, circumcision was the most innocent: for it had been expressly commanded of God, from the first moment that Abraham had been admitted into covenant with him: it was enjoined under the penalty of death: Moses himself was in imminent danger of being slain by God for the neglect of it: and, though abrogated by the Gospel, St. Paul had sanctioned the observance of it in the case of Timothy. 'Yet,' says St. Paul, 'the observance of this rite, with a view to increase or confirm your interest in the Gospel, will invalidate the Gospel altogether, and plunge your souls into inevitable perdition.'

Having solemnly asserted and testified of these things, he goes on to declare what he himself, and all true Christians, looked to for their justification before God: "'We," we Apostles, we who are truly under the influence of the Spirit, "wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." We renounce every other hope whatever: we blend nothing with the merits of Christ: we look for acceptance through His righteousness alone: and we expect to obtain an interest in it, and to be made partakers of it, simply and solely by faith in Him.']

In accordance with these are the views of every true Christian—

[Every one who is but a babe in Christ knows that he neither has, nor can have, any righteousness of his own. Having transgressed the law, he feels that he is obnoxious to its curse denounced against him; and that he must obtain some better righteousness than his own, if ever he would find acceptance with God. He looks into the Scriptures, and learns, that the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, the co-equal, co-eternal Son of God, has left his throne of glory, and assumed our nature; and in that nature has suffered the penalty which we had merited, and obeyed the law which we had broken; and has thereby "brought in an everlasting righteousness" for all who believe in him. Convinced of this, he casts himself entirely on the Lord; calling him "The Lord our Righteousness;" and saying, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Thus, renouncing all hopes by the works of the law, he "waits for the hope of righteousness by

faith" alone. He considers that righteousness as wrought out on purpose for him: he regards it as promised to him the very instant he believes in Christ: he looks to him by faith, in order to obtain an interest in it; and he "waits for" it God's appointed time: he waits for it *here*, even for the manifestation of it to his soul; and he waits for it *hereafter*, as the ground of his acquittal at the bar of judgment, and as the ground of his elevation to the throne of glory. At no period does he hope for any thing on the ground of his own merits: and though he knows that his works shall be rewarded, he looks for that recompence, not as a reward of debt, but of grace: and to God alone does he give all the glory of his salvation, from first to last.]

As the Apostle ascribes his experience in this respect to the agency of the Holy Spirit, it will be proper for me to shew,

II. How far the Holy Spirit operates to the production of these views—

"In God we live, and move, and have our being." But, in the economy of redemption, there is a special office assigned to the Third Person of the ever-blessed Trinity, even that of applying all its benefits to the souls of men, and rendering it effectual for their salvation. It was "through the Spirit" that the Apostle waited for the hope of righteousness by faith:

1. Through his teaching in the word—

[All the prophets, from the beginning, have spoken by inspiration of God, even as they were moved by the Holy Ghost^a. Now, from the beginning has the Holy Spirit declared, that our hope of righteousness is solely by faith in Christ. To Adam, as soon as he had fallen, was it made known, that "the Seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus Christ, should bruise the serpent's head," and repair the evil which that wicked fiend had introduced. Abel, we are told, "by faith offered" an acceptable sacrifice unto his God. Now this presupposes a revelation from God in relation to that sacrifice: for there can be no scope for the exercise of faith, where nothing has been revealed. Here, then, it is clear, that God had made known to Abel, that a sinner should be saved through the intervention of a sacrifice, even of that Great Sacrifice which should in due time be offered upon the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ; who is therefore called, "The Lamb

^a 2 Tim. iii. 16. 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. and 2 Pet. i. 21.

slain from the foundation of the world." Through all successive ages was this represented by a variety of types, and proclaimed in a variety of prophecies; to particularize which will be unnecessary, because St. Paul expressly affirms all that we have asserted:—"Now," says he, "the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, *being witnessed by the law and the prophets*; even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe^b." Here, I say, we are not only directed to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Author of salvation, but we are told that his righteousness is the ground of our hope; that we must obtain an interest in it by faith; and that to this way of salvation both the law and the prophets have borne witness from the beginning. It is clear, therefore, that if we ever attain to it at all, it must be "through the Spirit's" teaching in the word.]

2. Through his influence upon the soul—

[To this way of salvation man is extremely averse. He wants to have something of his own whereon to trust, and something which shall serve him as a ground of glorying before God. No human power can divert him from this: no arguments can convince him; no persuasion can move him; not all the promises or threatenings of the Scriptures can induce him to renounce all self-confidence, and rely on Christ alone. "God himself must make him willing in the day of his power." And this work the Holy Spirit effects. "He convinces the man, of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment^c:" of sin, so as to make him feel himself lost and utterly undone; of righteousness, so as to shew him that in Christ there is a sufficiency for the very chief of sinners; and of judgment, so as to assure him, that, by faith in this Saviour, Satan himself shall be vanquished, and bruised under his feet.

But, as man, whilst ignorant of his own sinfulness, disdains to accept of mercy in God's appointed way; so, when his eyes are opened to see how unworthy he is, he is ready to think that God never can shew mercy to one so vile as he. Here, therefore, the Holy Spirit's operations are again called for: and here he exerts himself effectually for the production of the desired end. Having first *inclined the person, and made him willing* to submit to God's method of justifying a sinner, he next *encourages and enables him* to repose his confidence in God, and to accept the proffered mercy. This the Holy Spirit does, by revealing Christ unto his soul, in all the fullness of his sufficiency, and in all the freeness of his grace. He glorifies Christ: he takes of the things that are Christ's,

^b Rom. iii. 21, 22.

^c John xvi. 8.

and shews them unto the trembling soul^d; and thus overcomes his reluctance on the one hand, and his diffidence on the other. In this way the person is brought to see, that "righteousness is by faith" only; and to "hope" for that righteousness, yea, and to "wait for" it, till it shall please God to make known to him his interest in it, and to speak peace unto his soul.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those whose views of this subject are indistinct—

[All have "a hope of righteousness," which, in some way or other, shall prove sufficient for their acceptance, when they go hence. But, if we come to examine the grounds of their hope, we find that few, very few, have their views clear, decided, scriptural. To renounce all dependence on our own works, to have no leaning whatever to any righteousness of our own, is a very rare attainment. If we were told, that the smallest measure of self-righteousness would make "Christ himself of no effect to us," and leave us in the very state of the fallen angels, who have no Saviour, we should account it harsh. We are willing that the Lord Jesus Christ should have the principal share of the glory arising from our salvation, but *not all*. Beloved brethren, I pray you, examine into this matter: see whether you can be content to be saved precisely as one of the fallen angels would be, if he were now plucked as a brand out of the burning. You must be brought to this. Why was it that so many millions of moral and religious Jews have perished, whilst millions of immoral and idolatrous Gentiles have been saved? It has arisen from this: the Jews could not be brought to renounce all dependence on the law; whilst the Gentiles have thankfully accepted the righteousness provided for them in the Gospel. "The Jews have stumbled," as thousands of Christians also do, "at that stumbling-stone:" for, on this account, Christ has proved to them no other than "a rock of offence;" whilst to those who have believed in him he has invariably proved a rock of salvation^e. And this is the peculiar danger of those who are most moral, and most religiously inclined. It was the Jews, who "had a great zeal for God," who fell into this unhappy snare, and would not submit to the righteousness provided for them in the Gospel^f. I pray God, that you, my brethren, may not reject the overtures that are now made to you. I believe that there are many of you who have a zeal of God: but I fear that, in many cases, it is not a zeal "according to knowledge."

^d John xvi. 14.

^e Rom. ix. 30—33.

^f Rom. x. 2—4.

You do not clearly see that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness;” and that he is so to those only who “believe^g.” I beseech you, leave not this matter unexamined, and undecided, in your minds: but beg of God to reveal his Son in you; and that you may never be suffered to rest, till you can say, with the Apostle, “I desire to be found in Christ, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith^h.”]

2. Those who, whilst they have these views, are afraid fully to rely upon them—

[A free and full salvation, even to the chief of sinners, and simply by faith in Christ, seems to be so rich a blessing, that it would be presumptuous in any human being to entertain a hope of it: and, from this feeling, many are led to put it away from them, as too great ever to be obtained. But, my brethren, if God has revealed it, and absolutely appointed it as the one only way in which he will receive sinners to himself, who are we that we should refuse it? This is a false humility. If we could see ourselves possessed of some worthiness, then we should be content to receive salvation at God’s hands: but, because we see our utter unworthiness, we put it from us. But this is greatly to dishonour God, and grievously to insult the Lord Jesus Christ; yea, and to do despite also to the Holy Spirit, who has revealed this salvation to us. Be content to receive all freely from God, as you receive the light of the sun, and the very air you breathe. Remember, that the more unworthy you feel yourselves to be, the more will his grace be exalted and magnified. There is a righteousness already wrought out for you, and ready to be imparted to you. It is appointed to be received simply and solely by faith. It is “the hope laid up for you in heaven:” and you are to “wait for” it, in the exercise of earnest and continual prayer. O! beg of the Holy Spirit to reveal it fully to your souls, and to overcome all your doubts and all your fears; and so to work faith in your hearts, that you may be filled with peace and joy in this world, and attain, in a better world, “the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”]

^g Rom. x. 2—4.

^h Phil. iii. 9.

MMLXXX.

THE OFFICE AND OPERATION OF FAITH.

Gal. v. 6. *In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.*

THE peculiar character of the Gospel is, that it shews how a sinner may be justified before God; yet the generality of Christians are far from entertaining just views of this most fundamental point: they confound the different offices of faith and works. But St. Paul distinguishes them with much accuracy and precision; he invariably declares that our justification is by faith; yet, though he denies to works the office of justifying, he invariably insists on them as the fruits and evidences of our faith. Nothing can be more decisive than the declaration before us.

We shall,

I. Explain it—

Man is prone to trust in outward rites and ceremonies—

[The Jews confided in the ordinance of circumcision: the Judaizing teachers also among the Christians inculcated the observance of that rite as a ground of hope: amongst ourselves also, many think it sufficient that they have been baptized, or expect to find admission into heaven because they have attended regularly at the Lord's table.]

But no outward observances can avail for our salvation—

[An external conformity with the rule of duty may proceed from the basest principles: it may spring from a desire to obtain man's applause, or to establish a righteousness of our own; and it may consist with the indulgence of evil tempers and vicious appetites. It cannot therefore of itself characterize the true Christian, nor can it "avail *any thing*" towards procuring the Divine favour. If indeed it proceed from faith and love, it will be rewarded; but if it be made the ground of our hope, it will be prevented, rather than procure, our acceptance with God^a.]

^a Gal. v. 2.

That which alone can avail for our acceptance with God, is “faith”—

[All the promises of God are made to faith^b. It is by faith that all the saints of old obtained salvation^c. St. Paul and St. James do not *really* differ respecting this^d, nor do any passages of Scripture *really* contradict it^e. If salvation be *of grace*, it must be *by faith*^f.]

Yet this faith must be productive of good works—

[It is not a mere notional assent to certain doctrines, nor is it a confident assurance respecting the safety of our own state; but it is a living operative principle in the heart: it is, on *our* part, the bond of union between Christ and our souls, and it cannot but discover itself by “works of love.” If it produce not holy tempers, and an unfeigned regard for the bodies and souls of men, it is no better than the faith of devils^g.]

The declaration in the text being explained, we shall,

II. Improve it—

Every part of Scripture, rightly understood, is profitable for the directing both of our faith and practice^h—

We will IMPROVE this before us,

1. “For doctrine,” that is, for the establishing of true doctrine—

[The way of salvation is simply by faith in Christ: and every kind of work, ceremonial or moralⁱ, must be considered

^b Mark xvi. 16. Acts x. 43.

^c Rom. iv. 3, 6, 7.

^d St. Paul (Rom. iv. 1—5.) speaks of Abraham as being justified before God: St. James (ii. 21—23.) speaks of Abraham as manifesting his faith before man, and as justifying his pretensions to the Divine favour by a suitable conduct and conversation.

^e There are many expressions both in the Old and New Testament which *seem* to assert salvation by works: but they are only declarative of the character of those that shall be finally saved, or of God's gracious determination to reward those works which flow from faith. If they were interpreted in any other way, they would invalidate the whole Gospel.

^f Rom. iv. 16. ^g Jam. ii. 19. ^h 2 Tim. iii. 16. See the Greek.

ⁱ The Apostle does not deny that circumcision is of any avail merely because it is *a ceremonial* work, but because it is *a work*; and because dependence on it would rob Christ of his glory. His argument therefore excludes works of whatever kind they be. Compare Gal. ii. 16.

as of no avail with respect to justification before God. However necessary, however valuable, our obedience may be if performed aright, it ceases to be valuable the moment we depend upon it. This is clearly stated in the text and context^k; and St. Paul himself was practically persuaded of this doctrine^l. Let us then renounce all confidence in our own works, and rely wholly on the blood and righteousness of Christ.]

2. “For reproof,” that is, for the refuting of false doctrines—

[Some have argued from the text, that faith saves us *as an operative principle*. Thus they affirm that we are justified by something *within ourselves*. But faith, *as a principle*, is not of more value than love^m; and if we were justified by it *as an operative principle*, we should have room to boast, just as much as we should if we were justified by love or any other principle. The reason of our being justified by faith is, that faith unites us unto Christ, which is a property not common to any other grace. Our works do not *make* our faith to be good or saving, but only *prove* it to be soⁿ. If our faith be genuine, we shall discover it *to God* by a simple dependence upon Christ, and *to man* by the practice of good works.]

3. “For correction” of unrighteous conduct—

[It must be confessed that many profess faith in Christ while their lives are unworthy of the Gospel: but such persons stand condemned even by their own profession. No faith is of any avail, but such as “works by love.” Let professors then weigh themselves in the balance of the sanctuary; let them examine their tempers, dispositions, and actions; let them acknowledge that a proud, envious, passionate, unforgiving, covetous, or selfish Christian, is as much a contradiction in terms, as an adulterous or murderous Christian; let them put away either their profession or their sins.]

4. “For instruction in righteousness”—

[To point out all the offices of love would be tedious. Let us contemplate it as set forth by the Apostle in 1 Cor. xiii.; — — — and, not content with any measure that we have attained, let us abound in it more and more^o.]

^k Gal. v. 2—6.

^l Phil. iii. 9.

^m 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

ⁿ Just as fruit does not *make* a tree good, but only *manifests* it to be so.

^o If this were the subject of a *Charity Sermon*, it would be proper to open *here* the nature, excellence, and importance of the particular institution which was to be benefited; and then to exhort the benevolent in general, and believers in particular, to give it their liberal support.

MMLXXXI.

OFFENCE OF THE CROSS.

Gal. v. 11. *Then is the offence of the cross ceased.*

THE Gospel, in the first ages, was an object of hatred and persecution both amongst Jews and Gentiles: to the Jews it was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness^a:” and it was the one constant labour of them both to corrupt it; the one by their traditions; the other by that which was falsely called philosophy. Hence, whilst those opposite parties felt the utmost contempt for each other, they united their efforts against Christianity; as Herod and Pontius Pilate had done for the destruction of its Founder.

In the passage before us, St. Paul is guarding his converts against the attempts of the Judaizing teachers; who sought to bring back their brethren to a dependence on the law, and who laboured even to subject the Gentile converts also to an observance of the Mosaic ritual. Circumcision, in particular, was that which these teachers insisted on as ordained of God and as of perpetual obligation. St. Paul tells the Galatians, that the whole of the Mosaic ritual was abrogated; and that they must never suffer any one to bring them into subjection to it^b. If he would have consented that the Jews should blend the Law with the Gospel, they would have been well pleased with him and with his doctrines too: “If,” says he, “I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? for then is the offence of the cross ceased.”

From these words I will endeavour to shew,

I. Whence it is that the doctrine of the cross gives offence—

The doctrine of the cross is simply that declaration, that Christ died upon the cross for our redemption, and that through his obedience unto death we must obtain favour with God — — —

Now this doctrine uniformly gives offence to those

^a 1 Cor. i. 23.

^b ver. 1.

who hear it, whether they be Jews or Gentiles. For it is,

1. An humiliating doctrine—

[It brings down all men upon a level; so far, at least, that they must renounce all dependence on themselves, and seek for salvation solely through the righteousness of another. It leaves no room for any man to boast, or to glory in any thing that he possesses. The best, as well as the worst, must owe their salvation simply and entirely to Christ, from first to last — — —]

2. An unaccommodating doctrine—

[It will not bend to men's prejudices or passions: nor must its advocates "give way to any one, no, not for an hour." Moral works, as well as ceremonial, must be excluded utterly from the office of justifying the soul; and the whole glory must be given to Christ alone — — —]

3. A peremptory doctrine—

[It appeals not to our reason, but demands assent to its dictates. It requires the most perfect submission to all that it inculcates; and threatens with eternal damnation every one who withholds his assent from its truths, or his obedience to its commands. Its plain declaration is, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned."

On these grounds, I say, it is hated. It is esteemed licentious, bigoted, severe: licentious, as denying any merit to works, and therefore cutting off all motives for the performance of them; bigoted, as admitting of no relaxation, but binding all persons to receive it simply as it is; and severe, as denouncing such heavy judgments on all who cannot bring their minds to embrace it.]

The Apostle clearly supposes that this character is essential to the Gospel; and that it will, to the remotest ages, give the same offence. We inquire therefore,

II. Why it can never cease to do so—

Two reasons may be assigned;

1. The Gospel must ever remain the same—

[No alteration has ever taken place in it, or ever can take place. It is a revelation of the way which God has devised for the salvation of fallen man. He gave up his only-begotten Son to die for us, and by his own blood to make an atonement

for our sins. The Lord Jesus Christ has executed this great work, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. "That cross we preach," as the one only means of reconciling man to God: and all the servants of God have but this one testimony to bear; namely, that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them^c." We have nothing to announce about the merits of man: we are not authorized to make any distinction between one man and another: we are to bear the same testimony to all, whether Jews or Greeks, bond or free: and without hesitation must we declare to all, that "no other foundation of hope for sinful man can ever be laid, than that which God has laid, which is Jesus Christ^d;" and that "there is no other name given under heaven whereby any man can be saved^e."

Now, if this could admit of any change, or any modification, we might hope to please men: but we are shut up to this: we can preach nothing else; and they must hear nothing else: and if they will not receive this, there is no alternative left them: perish they must, and under an accumulated condemnation too: for they will be judged, not only as transgressors of the law, but as despisers of the Gospel also; and, consequently, will have a far sorer punishment to bear, than if they had never heard of the salvation provided for them.]

2. Human nature ever remains the same—

[Men are born into the world with all the same propensities as they were in the apostolic age. Man has, by nature, the same pride of heart, that rises against the humiliating doctrines before specified. Every one wishes to have within himself some ground of glorying. To be stripped naked, as it were, without so much as one "rag of righteousness," as the Scripture expresses it, to cover him^f, is more than he can endure. To be *nothing*, that Christ may be *all*, is a hard lesson.

Again: the heart of man is as worldly as ever: it affects not the things that are above, but the things only of time and sense. But the same Gospel which requires such *self-renunciation in its principles*, requires no less *self-denial in its practice*. We must "live not in any degree to ourselves," but wholly and unchangeably "unto Him who died for us, and rose again." To this our carnal hearts will not submit: and until the heart be changed by grace, it will ever quarrel with these appointments, as unreasonably precise. In no point of view whatever is the Gospel palatable to the carnal mind: let a

^c 2 Cor. v. 18—20.

^e Acts iv. 12.

^d 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^f Isai. lxiv. 6.

new heart be given to a man, and all will be well: but, whilst the heart of man continues what it is, “the offence of the cross can never cease.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Let none reject the Gospel on account of the offence attaching to it—

[Many conceive the doctrine of the cross must be erroneous, because it is everywhere spoken against. But, if this is any argument against the doctrine now, it was so equally in the apostolic age; for the enmity of mankind against it was most inveterate and universal. I will certainly grant, that the existence of enmity against any doctrine will not of itself prove that doctrine to be true; for then the most pernicious tenets of the wildest enthusiasts would have a claim to our belief. But this is certain, that *any Gospel which gives no offence, must be false*. There are multitudes who hear *what they call* the Gospel, and are extremely well pleased with it: the worldly approve it: the self-righteous approve it: even the most profligate find no fault with it. Can *that*, I ask, be the Gospel which Paul preached? It is impossible. I know, indeed, that there is a way of preaching even truth itself without offence: but *the truth*, the *whole truth* delivered with authority as the *truth of God* MUST give offence. Men have no alternative left them, but to be offended with the preacher, or with themselves. And the very offence which they take is so far from being an argument against the doctrines they have heard, that it is a presumptive argument in their favour. If, then, you hear the doctrine of the cross firmly stated, and find that it gives offence, take it and compare it with the doctrine which St. Paul delivered: and, if you find that it accords with his, then embrace it, and hold it fast, and glory in it; saying, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”]

2. Let none cause others to reject it, by giving any needless offence—

[Many who have embraced the Gospel are sadly inattentive to the feelings and prejudices of those around them. They will run into many absurdities, without ever considering what stumbling-blocks they lay in the way of their unconverted brethren. Some give great offence by the crude and partial statements which they make of the Gospel; and others, by the harsh, uncharitable, and contemptuous way in which they speak of those who do not accord with their views. It is a great misfortune to the world to have such persons

connected with them ; because they are almost of necessity led to impute to the Gospel itself the indiscretions and absurdities of those who profess it. Let these incautious professors consider what evil they do, and what guilt they contract : for if there is a “ woe to the world because of offences, there is a double woe to those by whom the offence cometh.” As for those who cause “ the way of truth to be evil spoken of” by their inconsistent conduct, by their neglect of their own proper calling ; for instance, by a want of truth in their words, or integrity in their dealings ; “ let them look to it ;” for evil is before them : and the very Gospel which they so dishonour will plunge them into tenfold perdition. Let all who profess the Gospel see to it, “ that they give no needless offence in any thing.” Let them rather be far more observant of the whole of their duty, that they may “ give no occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully :” and let it be their one continued care to “ adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.”]

MMLXXXII.

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT, A PRESERVATIVE FROM SIN.

Gal. v. 16. *This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*

IN the Church of God, no less than in the ungodly world, there have always been found persons ready to foment divisions, and to kindle animosities between man and man. It was so in the apostolic age : it is so at this day : and it must of necessity be so, as long as tares are left growing amongst the wheat, or persons professing godliness suffer themselves to be led captive by a proud, unmortified, and contentious spirit. In the Galatian Church, persons of this description abounded : and to such a height did their contentions arise, that the Apostle was constrained to give them this solemn warning : “ If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another^a.”

Now, how shall this propensity be counteracted ? The Apostle tells us, “ Walk in the Spirit, and ye

^a ver. 15.

shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." Let us consider then,

I. The direction here given—

Before we can enter fully into the passage before us, we must explain the terms which the Apostle uses to convey his sentiments. The whole context shews that there are two principles in the regenerate man; one which is called flesh, and another which is called spirit: the one comprehending all which we bring into the world with us, and which is common to the natural man; the other importing that better principle which is infused into the soul by the Spirit of God, when he quickens us to a new and heavenly life: as our Lord says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit^b." Sin of every kind is the fruit of the former; and holiness of every kind is the offspring of the latter. Amongst "the works of the flesh," the Apostle numbers "idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies^c:" which shews, that we are not, when speaking of "the lusts or desires of the flesh," to confine our views to sins which are acted *in* and *by* the body; but to take in all the corruptions of our nature, in mind as well as body. With this explanation, we shall the more easily see, that, to "walk in the Spirit," we must walk,

1. In a constant attention to the new principle infused into us—

[I cannot give a more just idea of this new principle, which the Spirit of God imparts to us in our conversion, than by comparing it with the modern invention of the compass. Before the invention of the compass, mariners, in a dark night, were unable with any precision to direct their course. Whilst they were in sight of land, or had a view of the sun or stars, they could proceed with some degree of certainty: but, in the absence of these, they were altogether at a loss. But it is not so with mariners at this time. By the help of the compass they can by night steer the ship, as well as in the day; having constantly at hand, as it were, a sure directory.

^b John iii. 6.

^c ver. 20.

Now this is the difference between the natural and the spiritual man: the natural man has reason and conscience, which, to a certain degree, are capable of directing his path. But numberless occasions arise whereon they fail him utterly. The spiritual man has, superadded to these, a new and living principle abiding in him; a principle infused into him by the Spirit of God, and in exact accordance with his mind and will: and by this principle the Spirit himself guides him in all his way. The spiritual man, therefore, in every doubt or difficulty, should consult this divine principle within him; and see its bearings, and follow its directions. And as the mariner, whilst he observes his compass, consults also his chart and maps; so must we, whilst attending to the motions of this principle, consult also the directory which God has given us in the Holy Scriptures: and by means of these observations we shall be kept from any great aberrations from the way of truth. This process, however, must be continued throughout all our way: we must not only *live* in the Spirit, but must “*walk* in the Spirit,” every step we take^d — — —]

2. In a humble dependence on that Divine Spirit who has infused it—

[The new principle within us may suggest what is right; but it cannot enable us for the performance of it: for all power to do the will of God, we must be indebted altogether to the Spirit of God. Our blessed Lord expressly says, “Without me ye can do nothing^e.” There is no surer cause of failure than self-confidence and self-dependence. Peter, and with him all the other Disciples, declared that they would follow their Lord even unto death: but no sooner did the trial come, than “they *all* forsook him and fled.” And we, too, if we make resolutions in our own strength, shall learn, by bitter experience, that “he who trusteth in his own heart, is a fool^f.” We must be careful, too, not to make any difference between matters of greater or lesser difficulty, as though we were competent for the one any more than the other. We must, in the whole course of our journey, depend on God alone: we are never, for a moment, to feel strong in ourselves, but “strong *in the Lord*, and in the power of his might^g,” and in every step that we take, we must cry, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe^h.”]

To this direction the Apostle adds,

II. Our encouragement to the observance of it—

We have before shewn, that by the “lusts of the

^d ver. 25.

^e John xv. 5.

^f Prov. xxviii. 26.

^g Eph. vi. 10.

^h Ps. cxix. 117.

flesh" we are to understand all the motions of our corrupt nature: and from these we shall be preserved, if we follow the direction given us in our text. But here we must carefully distinguish between what is promised, and what is not.

1. It is not promised that we shall *not be tempted by* the lusts of the flesh—

[The carnal principle still remains with us after we are renewed; as the Apostle says, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things ye wouldⁱ." If, on the one hand, our spiritual principle keeps us from following the evil bias of our nature; so, on the other hand, the remainder of the carnal principle within us keeps us from following so fully as we could wish the dictates of our renewed mind. The Apostle Paul himself complained, that "when he would do good, evil was present with him;" and that, notwithstanding he delighted in the law of God after his inward man, "he had still a law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and at times bringing him, in some degree, into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members^k." And we, too, shall find the same, even to our dying hour. But,]

2. It is promised that we shall *not fulfil* them—

[God will "strengthen us by his Spirit in our inward man^l," and enable us to "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts^m." Weak as we are in ourselves, "nothing shall be impossible to us," if we trust in Himⁿ: he will "give us more grace^o," and "strength according to our day^p." Whatever be our temptations, "the grace of Christ shall be sufficient for us^q;" and "we shall be enabled to do all things through Christ, who strengthens us^r."]

From this subject we may clearly LEARN,

1. What is the great work we have to do—

[The one employment which we have daily to attend to, is, to be putting off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and to be "putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness^s." We are here as in a great hospital, where the process

ⁱ ver. 17.

^m ver. 24.

^p Deut. xxxiii. 25.

^s Eph. iv. 22—24.

^k Rom. vii. 21—23.

ⁿ Matt. xvii. 20.

^q 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^l Eph. iii. 16.

^o Jam. iv. 6.

^r Phil. iv. 13.

of healing is going forward, and many are convalescent: but we need still to apply the same remedies; and we are none of us possessed of that measure of health which we hope to attain previous to our dismissal. We follow still the prescriptions of our physician; and we hope, in so doing, to obtain, in due season, a perfect recovery — — —]

2. The need we have of constant vigilance and exertion—

[The old principle, as has been observed, still remains within us: and, if we be not constantly on our guard, it will regain its former ascendancy over us. A stronger army, if the sentinels fall asleep, may be surprised and vanquished by troops that are far inferior: and we too, notwithstanding the power given us by the indwelling Spirit, shall surely be overcome, if we be not constantly on our watch-tower. We must be prepared to meet our adversary at his first approach. Our blessed Lord says, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation:" and the sad consequences of sleeping on our post may be seen in the Disciples, when they failed to observe this important admonition^t. Corruption will often put on the appearance of virtue, and Satan assume the garb of an angel of light^u: but if we be on our guard, we shall detect his devices; and "if we resist him manfully, he will flee from us^x."]]

3. The security that is afforded us, if we be only faithful to ourselves—

[God assures us of success, if only we follow his directions. "If we sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption: but if we sow to the Spirit, we shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting^y." In two respects shall we be placed on a totally different footing from that on which we stood before: we shall not be judged according to the perfect law, which condemns us for the smallest act of disobedience; for, "if we walk in the Spirit, we are not under the law^z:" on the contrary, our imperfect obedience shall be eternally rewarded: for God would deem himself "unrighteous, if he were to forget" any thing that we do for his sake^a. With boldness, then, I say to every one amongst you, "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, and you may rest assured that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord^b."]]

^t Matt. xxvi. 41, 43, 56.

^u 2 Cor. xi. 14.

^x Jam. iv. 7.

^y Gal. vi. 7, 8.

^z ver. 18.

^a Heb. vi. 10.

^b 1 Cor. xv. 58.

MMLXXXIII.

THE PRINCIPLES OF FLESH AND SPIRIT CONSIDERED.

Gal. v. 17. *The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh : and these are contrary the one to the other : so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*

IT might be naturally imagined, that, from the moment of our conversion to God, the transformation of the soul into the Divine image should proceed so rapidly, as soon to extirpate sin altogether. But God has not seen fit so to carry on his work in his people's hearts. The Canaanites were not rooted out of the land at once, but "by little and little^a:" and so it is with our spiritual enemies: they have strongholds, from which they cannot be expelled, but by means of a long-protracted warfare. They remain, to be "thorns in our eyes and in our sides;" and ultimately in a more conspicuous manner to subserve the glory of God in their final extirpation. The best of men have yet within them two contrary and contending principles; the one being used by Satan as an instrument for the defeating of God's gracious purposes towards them; the other being employed by God for the furthering and securing of their eternal welfare. To what an extent the conflict between the two is sometimes carried, may be seen in the Galatian converts, many of whom betrayed by their contentious dispositions how great an ascendant the evil principle yet retained over them, notwithstanding all the professions of piety which they made, and the distinguished advantages they enjoyed. The Apostle did not mean to extenuate, and much less to excuse, the sinfulness of their instable and contentious conduct; but he exhorts them to walk more entirely under the influence of the Holy Spirit, as the only means of securing them against the evil propensities which they had manifested, and of carrying on unto perfection the good work that had been begun in them^b.

^a Deut. vii. 22. with Numb. xxiii. 55.

^b ver. 16.

In speaking of the two principles mentioned in our text, we shall notice,

I. Their united existence—

There yet remains in God's people an evil principle, which is here designated by the name of "flesh"—

[Man, since the fall of our first parents, is born into the world a corrupt creature: for "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" He is depraved in all the members of his body, and in all the faculties of his soul: there is no part which is not defiled and debased by sin: the understanding is become dark; the will perverse; the affections sensual; the conscience seared; the memory retentive only of things that are gratifying to the carnal mind. However this depravity may be checked by grace, it is not extirpated: it remains like the infection in the leprous house, and will remain till the house itself is levelled with the ground.]

But there is also in them a new heaven-born principle, which is called "spirit"—

[This is spoken of by our blessed Lord as contradistinguished from the other, and in precisely the same terms: 'That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit^c.' Under the term "flesh," he includes all that we bring into the world with us, and all that characterizes us *as men*: but the "spirit" is that which makes and designates us *new men*, or "new creatures in Christ Jesus." Indeed, it is called "the new man," as the other is "the old man;" and is "a renewal in the spirit of our mind," after the "very image of our God, in righteousness and true holiness^d." This new principle is infused into the soul at the time of our regeneration; and it is, if I may so speak, the seminal principle of our conversion. At the instant of its infusion into the soul, we are "quickened from the dead," and "pass from death unto life." Previously to the communication of it to us from above, we are like the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision: we may have the form of men, but we are not living men: it is not till we have received that, that "Christ liveth in us;" but then "Christ himself becomes our life^e." Now this principle co-exists with the former: it does not at once expel the former; nor is itself barred out by the former: but it enters into, and occupies, the whole man, even as the former did; and, according to the measure in which it is imparted, it communicates

^c John iii. 6.

^d Eph. iv. 22—24.

^e Gal. ii. 20. and iv. 19. and Col. iii. 4.

light to the understanding, submission to the will, heavenliness to the affections, tenderness to the conscience, and to the memory a tenacious apprehension of all that is good. From the time of its existence in the soul, it becomes a second *self*, a *spiritual self* as distinguished from the *carnal self*; agreeably to what the Apostle has repeatedly said for the purpose of distinguishing the more fully the actings of the two contrary principles: "It is no more I that do this evil, but sin that dwelleth in me^f."]

Both these principles being strong and active in the soul, we will consider,

II. Their contrary operations—

The flesh is always striving to regain its former ascendancy over us—

[The members of our bodies are but its agents and instruments: the chief seat of its residence is the soul; in every faculty of which it works, to "bring forth fruit unto death." In the understanding, it suggests proud reasonings against the revealed will of God, prompting us to dispute the authority of his precepts, the truth of his promises, the justice of his threatenings, and the wisdom of that mysterious plan of redemption which he has devised for the recovery of fallen man. In the will, it stirs up rebellion against him, and a determination to follow "its own corrupt and deceitful lusts." In the affections, it magnifies the things of time and sense, so as to make them, if not the only, at least the chief, objects of its pursuit. In the conscience, it produces such blindness and partiality, as to force from it a sentence of condemnation or acquittal, not according to truth, but according to its own predominant habits and inclinations. Nor does the memory escape its baneful influence, being filled by it with all manner of corrupt images, which from time to time it presents to the imagination, as the means of corrupting the heart, and enslaving the soul.

The better principle, on the other hand, protests against all the workings of the flesh, and presents to the mind such considerations as are calculated to awaken the tempted soul to a sense of its guilt and danger. Especially it reminds the soul of the obligations it owes to God the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ for all the wonders of redeeming love; and provokes it to high and heavenly pursuits. What is said of the Holy Spirit may also be said of this divine principle which is formed in the soul; namely, that "when the enemy comes in

^f Rom. vii. 17, 20.

like a flood, the Spirit lifts up a standard against him." The standard of the cross especially is that by which it calls forth into activity all the powers of the soul, and unites them in the service of their God. The reflux of a tide may not unfitly illustrate its operation on the soul. The flesh, like a majestic river, runs with irresistible impetuosity towards the ocean, till the tide begins to flow; and then, from an invisible but mighty influence, its waves are staid, till by degrees its current is turned back again towards the source from whence it emanated. This in the material world is but the process of a few hours; but in the spiritual world it is the work of the whole life. The dominance of the flesh is exhibited in the progress of the river to the ocean; the conflicts and triumphs of the spirit are depicted in the reversal of its course, and the progress towards the fountain-head.]

In this however the illustration fails, that when the tide has once overcome the resistance of the river, the conflict ceases: but it is not so with the Christian's conflicts: *they* continue to the end; and may perhaps be better compared with a conflagration which is opposed by engines, where the supply of water is scarcely equal to the demand: sometimes the fire yields to the well-directed stream; and at other times it breaks forth with renewed fury, and seems to defy the efforts of those who would arrest its progress. This, I say, will place in the justest view the operations of the two principles within us, and enable us to comprehend,

III. Their combined effects—

Acting always in opposition the one to the other, they prevent us from following either to the extent that we should, if there were but one principle within us. Through the simultaneous actings of each,

1. We do not serve *sin* as we *did*—

[We did follow it with constancy and alacrity, and without remorse. But not so now. The better principle will not admit of it. Like the angel that was sent to Balaam, it presents itself in our way to obstruct our course; and, if we overcome it on one occasion, it will meet us again, and renew its opposition till it has prevailed. Nor can we now so easily run into evil. Sin now appears to be sin, and consequently to be an object of aversion and dread: and, though its solici-

tations may prevail, we yield to them rather as a captive that is dragged against his will, than as persons following the bent and inclination of their own hearts. Now too we can no longer wipe our mouth, like the adulteress, and say, What evil have I done? Remorse and shame are now the followers of transgression: and an evil thought now occasions more pain in the soul, than formerly the perpetration of the act. Thus the corrupt principle, though not extirpated, is obstructed, and ceases to maintain an undisputed sway.]

2. Nor do we serve *God* as we *would*—

[The renewed soul pants after universal holiness: it would be pure as God is pure, and perfect as God is perfect. It would believe every word of God without the smallest hesitation or doubt: but unbelief creeps in, and weakens the energy of our faith. We would love God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength; but the contracted soul cannot expand itself to the occasion. We would draw nigh to him in prayer and praise, and hold most intimate fellowship with the Father and the Son; but the heart “starts aside as a deceitful bow,” and, like a bird entangled in a snare, is incapable of executing its most ardent desires. In a word, the renewed soul would be satisfied with no exertions, however great; no services, however eminent; no enjoyment of God, however intimate: it aspires after absolute perfection, and a total transformation into the Divine image. But, alas! its attainments fall infinitely short of its desires, and it is constrained to cry, “O that I had wings like a dove! then would I flee away and be at rest!”]

That this is no false representation of the Christian's state, may be seen from the account which St. Paul himself gives of his own experience. Of the united existence of these two principles, and of their contrary operations within him, and of their combined effects, he speaks at large in the seventh chapter to the Romans: “He had a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin, which was in his members:” “When he would do good, evil was present with him;” so that “the good which he would, he did not, and the evil which he would not, that he did.” “To will indeed was present with him; but how to perform that which was good, he found not.” Hence, feeling himself like a poor captive chained to a putrid corpse, which he was compelled to drag about with him to the latest period of his existence, he brake forth into this mournful complaint, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death^h?”]

^g Prov. xxx. 20.

^h Rom. vii. 14—24.

From this subject we may draw many important *lessons*.—It is of USE,

1. For instruction—

[How shall I know whether I am a Christian indeed? Shall I know it by a freedom from all anxieties, or by a deliverance from all sin? No; but by an earnest anxiety about the soul, and an incessant conflict with sin and Satan. A body, when dead, is insensible, whatever be the state to which it is reduced: and, if the soul be insensible of its state, it is a proof that it is dead also. A living soul trembles at the Divine judgments; labours to obtain a well-founded hope of peace with God; flees to the Lord Jesus Christ for refuge, and cleaves to him with full purpose of heart. Being united unto Christ by faith, the believer enlists under his banners, and, as a good soldier, heartily engages in a conflict with all his enemies. Never for a moment will he turn his back; he may be wounded, but he will not yield; he may be beaten down, but he will rise again to renew the combat: he will never put off his armour, till he is crowned with victory, and beholds “Satan himself bruised under his feet.”

Now, if we will ascertain our real state before God, let us inquire, what we know of this spiritual warfare? Is it begun? Is it carried on yet daily? Are we like soldiers in a camp, watching with all care, withstanding firmly the assaults of our enemies, and in our turn vigorously pursuing them to their strong-holds, and suffering none to approach us with impunity? Yes, verily, if we are Christians indeed, we are “warring a good warfare,” and “fighting the good fight of faith.” There may be, as in earthly campaigns, short seasons of comparative ease: but if we truly belong to Christ, this is our one business, our one employment, to walk in the Spirit, and to crucify the flesh with its affections and lustsⁱ.]

2. For consolation—

[No man can be engaged in this warfare without feeling deeply humbled on account of the strength and number of his corruptions. Many will be his sighs, his tears, his groans: yes, “even they who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even they will groan within themselves,” will “groan, I say, being burthened^k,” longing to get rid of their corruptions, and to have “mortality, with all its attendant evils, swallowed up of life^l.” But, if sin be our burthen, it is at least a comfort to us to reflect, that we are enabled to feel it a burthen: for there was a time, when it was harboured and indulged without remorse. This too is a source of comfort, that, in this

ⁱ Gal. v. 24, 25.

^k Rom. viii. 23.

^l 2 Cor. v. 4.

struggle within us, the younger shall prevail^m; “however sin may have abounded, grace shall much more abound; and as sin has formerly reigned unto death, so shall grace ultimately reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lordⁿ.” Doubtless the conflicts will be painful to flesh and blood: but by them shall the soul be trained for heaven, and be made “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.” Go on then, stripling as thou art, believer, against the Goliath that menaces thy existence: and know that thou mayest enter into the combat, singing, “Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”]

3. For direction—

[Whatever your attainments be, “*walk humbly with God.*” Were you as perfect as Job, it would still become you, on account of your remaining corruptions, to acknowledge yourselves “vile,” and to “repent and abhor yourselves in dust and ashes.” — — — *Be watchful too against your spiritual enemies.* With hearts so deceitful and corrupt as yours, and in the midst of an ensnaring world, surrounded too by myriads of evil spirits, whose devices none but God can understand, how can you hope to maintain your steadfastness, if you stand not upon your watch-tower, and guard against every motion of your corrupt nature? — — — *And never for a moment turn away your eyes from the Lord Jesus Christ.* Where can you wash away your past iniquities, but in the fountain of his blood? Or where can you obtain grace sufficient for your daily necessities, but out of the fulness which is treasured up for you in him? — — — Lastly, *continue instant in prayer.* Nothing can come to you but in answer to prayer; (for “if you ask not, neither will you have;”) nor shall any thing be wanting to you, if only you ask it of God for Christ’s sake. Examine your own hearts, or inquire of others what their experience has been, and you will find it invariably true, that your victories or defeats have been proportioned to your urgency in prayer, or your remissness in that holy duty. As in the days of old, whilst Moses held up his hands, Israel prevailed; but when his hands hanged down, success was transferred to Amalek; so it is in every age, with every saint. Watch therefore unto prayer: continue instant in prayer: “give unto your God no rest day or night:” plead with him: wrestle with him as Jacob did: and you shall find “your inward man renewed day by day,” till the work of grace that has been begun in you is perfected, and consummated in glory.]

^m Gen. xxv. 23. Rom. v. 12.

ⁿ Rom. v. 20, 21.

MMLXXXIV.

THE CHRISTIAN FREED FROM THE LAW.

Gal. v. 18. *If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.*

TO understand these words aright, we must notice, first the general scope of the whole epistle, and then, the particular scope of the more immediate context. The epistle itself was written to establish the doctrine of justification by faith alone, without the deeds of the law; in opposition to the Judaizing teachers, who insisted on the necessity of observing the Jewish ritual, in order to form a justifying righteousness, or, at all events, to increase and confirm their interest in Christ. In support of his argument, the Apostle shews, that though the Law was, as a preparatory dispensation, subservient to the Gospel, it was, as a ground of hope before God, directly opposed to the Gospel; so that they could not consist together, either in whole or in part; and any attempt to blend the Law with the Gospel would invalidate the Gospel altogether, and render "Christ himself of no effect^a." But, as this controversy had been carried on with great vehemence, and had produced a very grievous irritation in the minds of the contending parties, St. Paul, after establishing the truth on a basis that could not be shaken, and enjoining his converts to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, and on no account to suffer themselves to be entangled any more with the yoke of bondage," goes on to say, "Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty: only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another: for all the law is fulfilled in one word, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But, if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say, then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit

^a ver. 2, 4.

against the flesh : and these are contrary the one to the other ; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would ; but, if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law.” This, you perceive, is the immediate context, wherein the Apostle cautions the Galatians against either abusing their liberty, or maintaining it with an unchristian spirit ; since, if they acted as became their holy profession, they would exercise nothing but love, either towards their friends or their enemies. And this he trusted they would do ; because they had within themselves a spiritual principle, which, though strongly and perseveringly opposed by the carnal principle yet remaining in them, would ultimately prevail : and the effectual operation of that better principle would be sufficient of itself to prove that they were not under the law ; since the law could never accomplish so blessed a work ; whereas the very design of the Gospel, and its invariable effect, was to produce it. The dominance of the better principle was a proof that they were “ not under the law, but under grace^b.”

This I apprehend to be the precise import of the passage before us : wherein we see *a state presumed* ; namely, that the true Christian is “ led by the Spirit : ” and *a privilege inseparably connected with that state* ; namely, that the person so living is not under the law.

To these points I will now address myself, in their order.

Let us first notice,

I. The state presumed—

It is here taken for granted, that every child of God “ is led by the Spirit.” But, whether we are to understand this expression as referring to the Holy Ghost, or to that spiritual principle which is infused into us by the Spirit of God, it is not easy to determine. I rather prefer the latter sense, as more immediately suggested by the context : and it is certain that our Lord speaks of that divine principle

^b Rom. vi. 14.

under the very term which is here used; “That which is born of the Spirit, is *spirit*^c.” By being “led by the Spirit,” then, I understand the being under the influence of a spiritual principle, in opposition to that carnal principle which directs and governs the natural man. And this really characterizes every true Christian. Not only does he possess a new and spiritual nature; but in him,

1. It gains the ascendant—

[We acknowledge, that in him the old man still remains; and that the law of sin still works in his members, to bring forth fruit unto death. But there is in him a new man, a law in his mind, which counteracts his evil propensities, and enables him finally to overcome them. True, indeed, the conflict is often severe; and the saint will at all times be constrained to say, “The good which I would, I do not; and the evil which I would not, that I do.” Still, however, through grace he gains the victory over his corruptions, and is daily renewed in the spirit of his mind after the Divine image. Though tempted by the world, the flesh, and the devil, “he triumphs over them all in Christ Jesus^d,” and with his groans for more entire deliverance mingles this song of praise, “Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ^e!”]

2. It forms his taste—

[Outward victory may be gained to a great extent, whilst yet the heart remains unchanged. But where this new principle really exists, the man will hate the things which once he loved, and love the things which once he hated. Though he may still be tempted in a variety of ways, he will feel, in a measure, as our Lord himself did under the temptations of Satan. There will be less of the inflammable matter in his soul for the fiery darts of Satan to fix upon; and a greater plenty of water at hand, even of the Spirit of God, to counteract the first action of the fire upon his soul. There will also be a greater delight in heavenly things; so that he will engage in them with greater ease, and find himself more in his element, when employed in holy exercises. We may conceive what would be the taste of an angel, if sent down to sojourn for a time on earth; with what indifference he would behold the things of time and sense; and with what a zest he would perform the will of God: and thus the true Christian, though far, alas! from any thing like angelic attainments, will lose his

^c John iii. 6.

^d 2 Cor. ii. 14.

^e Rom. vii. 24, 25.

relish for the things which he once affected, and will savour those things only which are suited to the spiritual mind. And this will serve him as a criterion whereby to judge of his state before God. He may for a time be driven, by the force of temptation, from that which his soul supremely affects, even as the needle may be forced from its wonted rest: but let the opportunity once return for the discovery of his real feelings, and he will turn to his God, even as the needle to the pole: and by that he will shew whose attractions he delights in, and whose motions he obeys.]

3. It regulates his life—

[The aberrations of the more advanced Christian will be comparatively small and transient. Though in the world, he will not be of the world. Whether he move amongst the higher classes, or in the humblest walk of life, there will be a consistency about him: he will be “the man of God” in all places, and in all situations: “he will shine as a light in a dark world;” and “his light will shine more and more unto the perfect day.” The spiritual principle within him is compared by our Lord to a fountain of water; which pours not out its streams like an engine wrought upon from without; but sends them forth by a power from within, and “springs up, as it were, unto everlasting life.” Behold him day or night, and he is still the same; a blessing to the world, an ornament to his profession, an honour to his God.]

Let not any one suppose that this is an imaginary character, drawn only to serve a purpose: it is a real character; and, though doubtless it exists in different degrees, it really distinguishes every child of God: and in my text we see,

II. The privilege inseparably connected with it—

He is not under the law—

[He has nothing to fear from its *curses*; because the Saviour, in whom he has believed, and from whom he has received the gift of the Holy Ghost, has borne them for him. He has no dependence on its *promises*; seeing that he has a better righteousness than that can ever afford to fallen man; even the righteousness of Christ himself imputed to him, and made his by faith. Not even its *commands* have the same terrific influence on his mind which they had in his unconverted state. For though he still feels bound to obey them, he does not obey them with the same slavish fear which once oppressed his mind: they are no longer to him the terms of salvation, on a perfect compliance with which his everlasting

happiness depends: they are to him rather the expressions of his Father's will, which it is the joy of his soul to fulfil and execute. His real state in relation to the law, is like that of a woman to her deceased husband. He was once altogether under its authority, whilst in his unconverted state; but when he embraced the Gospel, the Law became dead with respect to him, and he dead with respect to it: and, though he still makes it the rule of his life, he obeys it through grace communicated to him by the Lord Jesus; to whom, as a woman on her second marriage, he now bears fruit unto holiness^f.]

Of his liberation from the law he has within himself a clear and decisive evidence—

[*This* I conceive to be the true meaning of my text. He is under the prevailing influence of the Holy Spirit, and of a new nature implanted by him: but “whence did he receive the Holy Spirit? Was it under the law, or by the hearing of faith?” It was by the hearing of faith, no doubt; that is, by the Gospel of Christ, who purchased for his people the gift of the Holy Spirit, and who sends forth his Spirit upon all who believe in him^h. “What the law could not do for him, in that it was weak through the flesh, the Gospel has done: “it has destroyed the power of sin” within him; and enabled him to “walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spiritⁱ.” Hence he is assured that “there is no condemnation to him:” for if “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus have made him free from the law of sin,” it has also freed him from “death,” which is the consequence of sin^k. Behold, then, the liberty into which he is introduced: “Being delivered from the power of darkness, he is translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son^l;” and, “being made free by him, he is become free indeed^m.”]

From this subject, I cannot but urge upon you two words of ADVICE:

1. Take care that *your principles* are pure and evangelical—

[It is thought by many, that if our outward conduct be correct, we need not be under any anxiety respecting the principles which we profess. But, is it of no consequence whether we continue under the law, or whether we embrace the Gospel? Are we not expressly told, that “as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curseⁿ?” Are we not also told, that “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman,

^f Rom. vii. 1—4.

^g Gal. iii. 2.

^h Gal. iii. 14.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 3, 4.

^k Rom. viii. 1, 2.

^l Col. i. 13.

^m John viii. 36.

ⁿ Gal. iii. 10.

made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons^o?" Is it of no importance, then, whether we lie under this curse, or be redeemed from it? Would God have used such means for our redemption, if it had been a matter of indifference whether we were redeemed or not? Take the Apostle Paul in his unconverted state: "he was, as touching the righteousness which was in the law blameless^p:" but yet he found afterwards, that, had he died in his unconverted state, he must have perished for ever^q. So, indeed, must all of you, who cleave to the law as a covenant of works, instead of laying hold of the covenant of grace. Nothing can be more clearly declared than this: Be your advantages or attainments what they may, if you go about to establish your own righteousness, instead of submitting to the righteousness of God, you must perish^r. The very law itself is intended to "lead you to Christ^s;" and "He is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth^t." I call you, then, to believe in Christ for salvation, and, like the Apostle, to renounce your own righteousness altogether, that you may be found in Christ, and be accepted through "the righteousness which is by faith in him^u."

2. Take care that *your conduct* be such as becometh the Gospel of Christ—

[You clearly see, in my text, that principles and conduct must go together: neither will stand without the other. Without faith in Christ, you can never hope to receive the Holy Spirit, or to be renewed in the spirit of your mind: nor, on the other hand, will any change whatever avail you, if you rely not entirely on the Lord Jesus Christ for righteousness and salvation. It is in vain to build a superstructure, if it be not founded on Him; and it is in vain to think you are founded on him, if your faith do not manifest itself by a superstructure of good works. You must never forget, that "faith without works is dead." You must "be led by the Spirit of God, if ever you would approve yourselves sons of God^x." The world, as I have before shewn you, must be put under your feet: sin, in all its actings, must be mortified and subdued: the whole soul must be given up to God; and holiness become the very element in which you breathe and live. Indeed, it is not a mere formal observance of duties that will suffice: we must "have the very mind that was in Christ," and "walk in all things as Christ himself walked." This will

^o Gal. iv. 4, 5.^p Phil. iii. 6.^q Rom. vii. 9, 10.^r Rom. ix. 30—33. and x. 3.^s Gal. iii. 24.^t Rom. x. 4.^u Phil. iii. 9.^x Rom. viii. 14.

be our evidence, that we are really his : for then only can it be known that “ we are not under the law, but under grace, when Christ himself lives in us, and no sin whatever is permitted to have dominion over us^y.”]

^y Rom. vi. 14. with Gal. ii. 19, 20.

MMLXXXV.

THE FRUITS OF THE FLESH AND OF THE SPIRIT CONTRASTED.

Gal. v. 19—24. *Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these ; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like : of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance : against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.*

THROUGHOUT this whole epistle we have mention made of two covenants, under the one or other of which all mankind are of necessity comprehended, the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace. Those who are under the covenant of works are under the curse of God as transgressors : but those who are under the covenant of grace, are delivered from that curse through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has become a curse for them^a. The transition from the one state to the other is effected solely by faith^b. But faith is an operation of the mind wholly invisible to men, and but too liable to be mistaken even by ourselves. How then shall it be ascertained either by others or ourselves to which of these covenants we adhere ? We are told, that, on the transition from the one to the other, we are endued with a new and vital principle, under the influence of which we from that moment begin to live.

^a Gal. iii. 10—14.

^b Gal. iii. 25, 26.

The principle which rules in us under the former state, is called “flesh;” and that which animates us under the latter, is called “Spirit.” Not that on the transition from the one state to the other, the former principle is taken away: No; it lives, and acts, and withstands with all its might the latter principle, and prevents it from operating so successfully as we could wish: but still it is progressively weakened in its operations: and by the dominance of the better principle we know that we are no longer under the law, nor exposed to the curse which the legal covenant entails on all who are cleaving to it.

Thus we have somewhat of a criterion whereby to judge of our state: but still that criterion is of no farther use than as we have a distinct view of the fruits which the two opposite principles will produce: let these be clearly marked, and then no further difficulty will arise: we have only to examine our works, of what kind they are; and then we shall arrive at a certain conclusion as to our state before God: for, as “a good tree cannot bring forth corrupt fruit, nor a corrupt tree good fruit,” we shall know the quality of the tree by the fruit which is produced by it.

This satisfaction then is afforded us by the Apostle in the words before us: in which we see,

I. The works of the flesh—

In enumerating them, the Apostle mentions,

1. Those which stand in more immediate connexion with *the body*—

[“Adultery” is an evil against which even heathens in all ages have felt the deepest indignation. “Fornication” was not regarded by them in so heinous a light: would to God the malignity of it were duly appreciated even by the Christian world! But God views these evils with the utmost abhorrence; and not the *acts* only, but the *dispositions* from which they spring: “Uncleanness and lasciviousness,” if cherished in the heart, are marked by him with the same displeasure as the acts to which they lead; because the *indulging* of them, in word, in look, in thought, indisputably proves, that it is not the fear of God that keeps them from breaking out into more open acts, but some other consideration totally

distinct from a regard to him: since the fear of God, if operating at all, would operate as much to the suppression of the desire, as to the non-indulgence of the act. Hence the mere looking on a woman to lust after her, is declared, on infallible authority, to be an actual commission of adultery with her in the heart. Now all these acts and dispositions proceed from a corrupt principle within us, even from that principle which is called “flesh,” and which is the true source of all the other evils we commit.]

2. Those which more properly have their seat in *the mind*—

[Of these, some have a more immediate reference to *God*, and others are called forth only in our intercourse with *men*. Of the former kind are “idolatry and witchcraft,” which being specified as “works of the flesh,” clearly shew what we are to understand by “flesh,” namely, not merely any corporeal propensity, but that general propensity to evil which operates throughout the whole extent of our fallen nature.

“Idolatry” is a total rejection of God; and “witchcraft” is an application to evil spirits, to impart to us something which we have no hope of obtaining from the true God: and both the one and the other of these is properly a “work of the flesh,” inasmuch as it betrays a total alienation of heart from God, and an entire subjection to that “carnal mind,” which, as God himself declares, “is enmity against him^c.”

The other evils which are called forth by our intercourse with *men*, as “hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like,” form such a picture of our fallen nature as may well humble us in the dust before God. It is unnecessary to enter into a distinct consideration of them: it is in the aggregate only that we can stop to notice them at this time: but what an accumulation of evil do they present to our view! Yet is it no other than what we may see in every community under heaven. Look at the seditions that agitate states; the divisions and heresies that disturb the Church; the feuds and quarrels that set man against his fellow man, and often terminate even in “murder” itself: whence do they all arise? Come they not hence, even from the lusts that war in our members^d? or, in other words, from the corruption of the human heart? There are some evils which pass under the milder name of good fellowship, and conviviality; some which, like the “revellings” that were common among the heathen, consist of feastings, dancings, and excess of every kind: but, however we may soften them down by specious names, and

^c Rom. viii. 7.

^d Jam. iv. 1.

plead for them as innocent amusements, they are all hateful to God, and destructive to man : insomuch that the man who finds his pleasure in them “ can in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.” Often had the Apostle entered his protest against such carnal indulgences, so unworthy of a rational being, and so unsuited to persons standing on the brink of eternity. Can we conceive, that if man had retained his primeval innocence, he would have found delight in any such things as these ? If the ungodly themselves saw pious people seeking their happiness in such things as these, would they see no incongruity between their professions and their occupations ? Yes ; they would be the first to proclaim the hypocrisy of such professors : which is itself an acknowledgment that the things themselves are adverse to piety, and inconsistent with it.

Know then, that all these and “ *such like* ” evils, whether arising from the body, or emanating from the mind, are decidedly to be ranked under “ the works of the flesh,” “ which whosoever doeth shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Unwelcome as this declaration was to the carnal man, St. Paul hesitated not to make it repeatedly, and in the strongest terms : and we also, if we will approve ourselves faithful to God and to the office committed to us, must proclaim the same awful truth, and forewarn all, that, if they continue under the power of any of the hateful dispositions before specified, or seek their happiness in the things of time and sense, they will inevitably and eternally exclude themselves from the kingdom of heaven.]

In contrast with these, the Apostle proceeds to enumerate,

II. The fruits of the Spirit—

And here he mentions,

1. Those which have their sphere of action chiefly within our own bosoms—

[The very mention of them marks at once their nature and their origin—“ Love, joy, peace ! ” Whence come they ? Are they the offspring of our corrupt nature ? No ; nature never bare such fruits as these : these spring from that divine principle, which is imparted to us by the Spirit of God at the time of our regeneration and conversion. Then love springs up in the soul : love to God ; love to Christ ; love to man for Christ’s sake. Then also does a “ joy with which the stranger intermeddleth not,” a “ joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” a joy in the testimony of a good conscience, a joy in the prospect of a glorious immortality, transport the soul : and its ebullitions, which, if continued, would exhaust the

strength of our animal frame, subside into a peaceful composure, a sweet serenity of mind, a “peace of God which passeth all understanding.” These are the never-failing fruits of divine grace in the soul. A variety of circumstances may occur which may impede the exercise of these holy affections; especially the workings of a corrupt nature, still striving to bring us into captivity to sin, may occasionally prevail to damp our joy and interrupt our peace; but according to the measure of the grace given unto us, will be the fruits of that grace abounding in the soul.]

2. Those which have a more immediate relation to our fellow-creatures—

[Towards them, both the active and passive virtues are called forth by incidents of daily occurrence. “Long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith (or fidelity), meekness” have a constant scope for exercise, as also “temperance” has, both in the desire of earthly things, and in the enjoyment of them. Here again it is not necessary to enter minutely into these different virtues: it is the collective body of them which characterizes the true Christian, and marks, beyond a possibility of doubt, the excellence of the principle from which they spring.

“Against these there is no law.” Not one word is there to be found in all the Holy Scriptures that condemns the production of these fruits. Were they condemned, our blessed Lord and Saviour must fall under condemnation; since he maintained and exercised these virtues to a degree never equalled by mortal man. It is impossible to yield these fruits too much: the more we abound in them, the more we resemble the Lord Jesus Christ, and the more do we evince a meetness for the heavenly inheritance.]

Now comes the point to be determined; namely, What is,

III. The Christian’s state in reference to them both—

The description given of Christians must not be overlooked—

[There is no periphrasis by which they can be more fitly described, than that given in our text, “They that are Christ’s.” This is their title universally; and it belongs to them alone. They were from eternity given unto Christ by the Father; as Christ himself says, “Thine they were; and thou gavest them to me^e.” They have been purchased by

^e John xvii. 6, 9, 11, 12, 24.

Christ himself, as his peculiar possession: and they have given up themselves to him by a willing and deliberate surrender of all that they are and have. By a vital union also are they his, being, as it were, "one spirit with him." Hence in many parts of Scripture are they designated as in the words of our text: "All things are yours; and ye are Christ's^f:" and again, "If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's^g." Blessed distinction! glorious privilege! Believer, think of thyself under this character, and then see what obligations thou owest to God for this unspeakable mercy, and "what manner of person thou shouldest be in all holy conversation and godliness."]

Their state is suited to this high character—

[“They have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” Crucifixion, it must be remembered, is a lingering death. The thieves who were crucified with Christ poured forth their venom against him, even whilst they were suspended on the cross. Thus also, “the old man in believers is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin may be destroyed, that henceforth they should not serve sin^h :” nevertheless it is not utterly extinct: it still lives; and still rages and rebels against Christ; and would, if suffered to come down from the cross, regain its former ascendancy. But there it is fixed: and thence it never shall come down, till the body itself shall cease to live. All its affections and all its desires, though still possessed of considerable strength, are checked in their operation, and restrained in their exercise; “the Spirit” now reigns: the new affections now put forth a vigour, which “the flesh” can no longer withstand. The warfare is indeed continued: but victory declares itself on the side of the better principle; so that, whereas the believer formerly “walked after the flesh,” he now in his daily life and conversation “walks after the Spirit,” and progressively advances in his heavenly course as long as he continues in the worldⁱ. “His path is like the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”]

SEE then from hence,

1. How blessed is the influence of the Gospel!

[By the Gospel this change is wrought. And, to form an estimate of the change, paint to yourselves the countenances of the Jews when they met on the day of Pentecost with their hands yet reeking with their Saviour's blood; and the same

^f 1 Cor. iii. 23.

^g 2 Cor. x. 7.

^h Rom. vi. 6.

ⁱ Rom. vi. 20, 22. with viii. 1, 4.

persons on the evening of that day, when they were “eating their bread with gladness and singleness of heart, blessing and praising God:” methinks, heaven and hell scarcely present a greater contrast, than those very persons within that short period. Yet such is the change which the Gospel will produce, wherever it is received in deed and in truth. Hear how the Prophet Isaiah describes it: “Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree; and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off^k.” O, beloved, see that this change take place in you: for to effect it is the glory of the Gospel; and no further than this change is wrought in you, have you any evidence that you belong to Christ.]

2. How vain are the expectations of carnal professors!

[Frequently does the Apostle characterize as “carnal,” those who are yet under the power of unholy tempers and affections. Look, thou professor of godliness, and see what thy conduct is, in the family, the Church, the state. Art thou a favourer of feuds, of heresies, of seditions? Take off thy mask, and proclaim thyself an hypocrite. Thou hast no part nor lot in the salvation of God. Yet rest not here: but go on to examine how far all holy tempers and heavenly affections abound in thee: see whether thou livest in the habitual exercise of love, joy, peace; and whether thy whole walk be marked by long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance? See whether in these things thou resemblest Him whose property thou professest thyself to be, even that blessed Jesus who requires thee to walk as he walked? Know of a certainty, that, “if thou walkest after the flesh, thou shalt die; but if through the Spirit thou mortifiest the deeds of the body, then, and then only, shalt thou live^l.”]

3. How desirable is it to obtain an interest in Christ!

[All this will he do for those who truly believe in him. Came he, think you, to save you from hell only? No; he came to “save you from your sins.” He came to make you new creatures; and to transform you into the Divine image, in righteousness and true holiness. Seek then an interest in him. Give up yourselves to him, to be washed in his blood,

^k Isai. lv. 12, 13.

^l Rom. viii. 13.

and to be renewed by his Spirit. Do this, and you shall have no cause to complain that your corruptions are invincible: for his grace shall be sufficient for you, even though your corruptions were ten thousand times more powerful than they are. Nor imagine that the maintenance of holy tempers and affections shall be such an impracticable task as Satan would represent it to be: for the love of God shed abroad in the heart shall render every thing easy. Only receive the Lord Jesus Christ into your hearts by faith, and he will work effectually within you, as he does in all his saints: "He will fulfil in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power; and so shall the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ^m."

^m 2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

MMLXXXVI.

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT.

Gal. v. 25. *If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*

MEN, as creatures, may be called "the offspring of Jehovah," "in whom they live, and move, and have their being^a." But, as created anew in Christ Jesus, we have a nearer relation to God, seeing that his Spirit dwelleth in us: and consequently, we are bound in a more peculiar manner to glorify him by a suitable life and conversation. This is strongly intimated in the words of our text: in which we see,

I. The Christian's character—

It is here *assumed* that the Christian "lives in the Spirit." That the Christian's character, as here described, may be fully understood, let us mark,

1. The import of the assumption—

[Two things are implied in the expression "living in the Spirit," namely, that the Christian is endued with the Spirit; and that he lives under the influence of the Spirit. The Christian has not merely the powers and faculties which he brought into the world with him, and which an heathen possesses as well as he; but he has received the Spirit of God,

^a Acts xvii. 28.

by whom he has been quickened from a death in trespasses and sins, and been made a partaker of a new principle of life, whereby he is enabled to live to God. This new principle is distinct from any thing which man, by any powers of his own, can acquire, and from any thing which can by any means be derived from man. It is a sovereign gift of God, as much as the natural life is: and they who have received it, are said to have “been born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” They who have experienced this heavenly birth, have the Spirit of God dwelling and abiding in them; enlightening their minds, directing their steps, sanctifying their hearts, and “fulfilling in them all the good pleasure of their God” — — —]

2. The truth of this assumption—

[It is taken for granted by the Apostle, as an unquestionable truth, that every real Christian “lives in, and by, the Spirit.” And well may this be taken for granted; since the Spirit of God is to the soul of man, what the soul itself is to the body. Without the soul, the body is dead; and the body, when bereft of it, is no more a man, but a mere corpse. So the soul without the Spirit of God is dead; and the person destitute of the Spirit, is not a Christian, but a mere man, like any heathen man. This is expressly asserted by the Apostle Paul: “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, *he is none of his*^b.” To the same effect, also, our blessed Lord most solemnly affirms, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God^c.” The point, then, is clear and indisputable: a Christian is one who is born of the Spirit, and who lives under the Spirit’s influence: and if any person would estimate his own character aright, he must inquire into these two points. It is not sufficient that he has been baptized into the faith of Christ, or that he gives a speculative assent to all the truths of Christianity; he must possess a principle which none but God can give him, and which regulates all his views, desires, and pursuits. I pray you, brethren, before you go any further, examine yourselves in relation to this matter: for I must declare to you before God, that if Jesus Christ dwell not in you in this manner, you are not Christians, but mere baptized heathens: and so unquestionable is this truth, that St. Paul makes it a matter of appeal, to be decided by your own selves: “Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates^d?”]

Answerable to this high character are,

^b Rom. viii. 9.

^c John iii. 3, 5.

^d 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

II. His obligations—

“If we be in the Spirit, we should also walk in the Spirit;” that is, we should walk,

1. In compliance with his motions—

[There are inward motions of the Spirit, which a person who lives nigh to God may discern, and which it becomes him very carefully to follow. Not that they can with certainty be distinguished from the voice of a man’s own conscience, except by the quality of the suggestions themselves; (for it is in and by the conscience that the Spirit speaks:) but they are so agreeable to the mind of God, that they manifest from whom they come; and God himself, “who knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit,” when he beholds them in us, acknowledges them to be of divine origin^e. When temptations to evil arise, the Spirit softly whispers to the soul, “O, do not that abominable thing which I hate^f.” So also, when doubts arise in the mind respecting the path of duty, he causes us to “hear a voice behind us, saying, This is the way; walk ye in it^g.” And in a mind that is at all well regulated, I believe that the first intimations of conscience will be found to be, for the most part, most accordant with the mind and will of God: and though I would on no account discourage the closest possible examination of what is so suggested, and the trial of it by the touchstone of God’s word, yet I cannot but say, that in our subsequent reasonings the voice of the Spirit is too often silenced, and its suggestions are superseded by the dictates of prejudice, or fear, or interest, or passion.]

2. In obedience to his will—

[God’s will is revealed in the written word; and to that we must refer, on every occasion. In that is our whole course distinctly marked; and by that must our every step be regulated: as says the prophet; “To the word and to the testimony: if we speak not according to that word, there is no light in us^h.” By that must the suggestions, of which we have before spoken, be tried. For it is possible that suggestions may come even from the wicked one: and if we were to place implicit confidence in them, we might run into the most fatal errors, whilst we supposed ourselves under heavenly guidance. Of this we are sure, that the Spirit of God never moves us to any thing which is contrary to the written word. In following the voice of inspiration, we are safe: and to that we should yield the most implicit obedience. When we

^e 1 Cor. ii. 10, 11. with Rom. viii. 27.

^g Isai. xxx. 21.

^f Jer. xliv. 4.

^h Isai. viii. 20.

combine the two, and are simultaneously directed by the light *within* and the light *without*, we may reasonably hope that we are in the right way, and “walking in the Spirit,” as God requires.]

From the passage thus explained, I would take occasion to COMMEND to your constant aim,

1. Consistency—

[This is the primary point suggested in our text: our practice must accord with our profession: if, as we profess, we “live in the Spirit,” we must take care to “walk in the Spirit.” We must “walk worthy of our high calling;” or rather, I should say, we must “walk worthy of the Lord himself.” We must attend equally to both tables of the law; and never make a respect for the one a plea for neglecting and violating the other. Our conduct must be uniform, at all times, in all places, under all circumstances. What we are in the public assembly, and in the society of God’s people, that we must be in the world, the family, the closet. All our tempers and dispositions must resemble those of Christ; so that every one who sees us may bear testimony to us, that we “have both the Spirit of Christ,” and “the mind of Christ.” Dear brethren, it is in this way only that we can honour God, or approve ourselves his children indeed.]

2. Advancement—

[We must be making a continual progress in the divine life; and never think ourselves so advanced, but that we need to be going forward in our Christian course. Our “path must be like that of the sun, which shines more and more unto the perfect day.” Even St. Paul thought not that he had yet “attained, or was already perfect:” but this one thing he did, “forgetting the things that were behind, and reaching forth unto those that were before, he pressed forward toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” And we also, if we would be perfect, must “be thus minded.”]

3. Rest—

[To this it is our privilege to look forward; even as Israel did, when journeying in the wilderness. In truth, this life, with all its labours and conflicts, would be a very miserable life, if we had no prospect of a better. But “there is a rest that remaineth for the people of God:” and with that in view, we may well exert ourselves with all our might. That will richly recompense all our labours. What will not men do,

ⁱ Phil. iii. 13—15.

even for a corruptible crown? But ours is incorruptible. "Be not weary, then, in well-doing: for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not."]

MMLXXXVII.

BENEVOLENCE RECOMMENDED.

Gal. vi. 2. *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

TO open and unfold the mystery of the Gospel, is doubtless an employment which, in point of utility to others, or of comfort to ourselves, may vie with any other, in which a human being can be engaged. But to inculcate the morality of the Gospel is also a most delightful office: and a minister of Christ, who feels averse to it, gives reason to fear that he has never yet entered into the spirit of the doctrine which he professes to teach. St. Paul manifestly delighted in this good work; for, in the close of all his epistles, he paid the most marked attention to it^a. Nor did he rest in general instruction, but descended to the most minute particulars; omitting nothing that could tend to advance the honour of God, or the welfare of mankind.

That we may enter into the precept before us, we will consider,

I. The duty enjoined—

Burthens of some kind every man is called to sustain—

[Some may be *comparatively* freed from them; nor do they lie on any with the same weight and pressure *at all times*: but no child of man is altogether exempt from them. The body is subject to diseases, the mind to trials, and the outward estate to disasters, which no human foresight can prevent, no power on earth can avoid. They greatly mistake, who think that trouble is the exclusive portion of the poor. The rich, in their respective spheres, are as obnoxious to it as the poor; and, for the most part, by reason of their keener sensibility, they feel it more acutely.]

^a See Gal. v. 19—24.

Nor can any support their burthens alone—

[The king upon the throne needs the assistance of others, as much as the beggar upon the dunghill. The very necessities of our nature call for mutual aid. No one could support himself alone. It is by the division of labour that society is kept together, and every individual that composes it is made happy. All, taking on themselves some one office for the benefit of others, promote, at the same time, both their own welfare, and the welfare of the whole community. The artisan, the man of science, the practitioner in any useful line, supply the wants of others in common with their own; and, whilst depending on their employers for their own support, administer support in return to them. It is thus that the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, the sick healed, and the weak protected in their rights.]

But, not confining ourselves to the duty of our own particular station, we should endeavour, as God may enable us, to bear the burthens of all—

[This may be done *in a way of sympathy*, and *in a way of succour*. As members of the same body, we ought all to care for each other^b, and to sympathize with each other under our several circumstances, whether of joy or sorrow. The Divine command is, “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep^c.” But sympathy must shew itself in deeds, and not in words only. It will be to little purpose to “say to our destitute and naked brother, ‘Be warmed,’ or, ‘Be filled,’ whilst we withhold from him what is needful for his support^d.” True, indeed, we cannot all administer relief to others *in the same way*, or *to the same extent*: but what we *can* do, we should with alacrity and joy. The eye, the ear, the tongue, the hand, the foot, cannot all render *the same* service to the body: but, if they improve their respective energies and powers for the good of the whole, they answer the end for which they were formed. Thus *we* should consider what service we are best capable of rendering to every afflicted brother: and to that we should address ourselves with all diligence; blessing and adoring God, who has put it into our power to shew love to our fellow-creatures, and fidelity to Him. The word which St. Paul used, to express the assistance which the Holy Spirit affords to us in our necessities, marks the precise office which we are to occupy in assisting all who stand in need of help from us: we should take hold on the opposite end of their load, and bear it together with them^e. And this

^b Phil. ii. 4. 1 Cor. xii. 25. ^c Rom. xii. 15.

^d Jam. ii. 14—16.

^e Rom. viii. 26. συναντιλαμβάνεται.

we *may* all do in some measure, yea, and *must* do, if we would approve ourselves faithful to the trust reposed in us.]

That we may be stimulated to this duty, let me endeavour to impress upon your minds,

II. The consideration by which it is enforced—

In executing this office, we “fulfil the law of Christ”—

[*The Lord Jesus Christ has enjoined it as our duty*: “These things I command you, that ye love one another^f.” He has gone further; and *proposed himself to us as the pattern* to which, in our exercise of love, we should be conformed: “A new command I give unto you, that ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another^g.” He has gone further still; and declared, that the love which we are here called to exercise is *the distinctive badge of all his followers*: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” Nay more; he has told us that it is *the test whereby he will try our fidelity to him* in the day of judgment: to those who have administered to the necessities of others he will give a suitable reward; and to those who have neglected this great duty, a just and fearful doom^h.

Now, if he had only expressed it as *a wish* that we would perform such services for him, methinks it were abundantly sufficient to call forth all our exertions in his service. But when he issues it as his *command*, as his command which we must obey at the peril of our souls, who will venture to disobey it? Think but a moment what Christ has done for you: “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be richⁱ.” Has He, the God of heaven, left his throne of glory, that, through his own sufferings unto death he might exalt you to it: and will not you, a redeemed sinner, forego some small comforts, in order to administer to the necessities of your afflicted brethren; and especially when called to it by your Redeemer himself? — — —]

This law, then, I now call you to obey—

[Let the affluent bear the burthens of the poor — — — The healthy, of the sick — — — The enlightened, of the ignorant — — — The saved, of those who are perishing in their sins — — — And let those who are not able to engage actively in the duties of benevolence spread the cases of their afflicted brethren before God in prayer, and bring down from God the help which they themselves are unable to impart — — —]

^f John xv. 17.

^h Matt. xxv. 34—46.

^g John xiii. 34.

ⁱ 2 Cor. viii. 9.

MMLXXXVIII.

AGAINST SELF-DECEIT.

Gal. vi. 3—5. *If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden.*

SELF-KNOWLEDGE is at the root of all true religion. Without that, we shall have no right disposition, either towards God or man. Without that, we shall not be able to pity the fallen, or sympathize with the afflicted; but shall be alike unfeeling towards the failings and the necessities of our fellow-creatures. But, if we are duly conscious of our own weakness, we shall be ready to “restore in meekness any brother that has been overtaken with a fault:” and, if we know our own desert, we shall most willingly labour to “fulfil the law of Christ, in bearing the burthens of others,” as He has borne ours. To cultivate self-knowledge therefore is, in this view, extremely important: but more especially is it so in the prospect of that judgment which God himself will shortly pass on every child of man: for, whatever be our estimate of our own character, it is not by that, but by God’s own view of us, that our state shall be determined to all eternity. This is plainly declared in the words before us; in which we may see,

I. An evil complained of—

The entertaining too high an opinion of ourselves is a common evil; I should rather say, is an evil co-extensive with the human race, with those at least who have not been converted by the grace of God. If it be asked, Whence does this evil arise? I answer,

1. From judging ourselves by a defective standard—

[The generality take no higher standard than that which custom has established in the place where they live: and if they conduct themselves agreeably to that, they consider themselves as having fulfilled all that can reasonably be required of

them. They never once suspect, that to “walk according to the course of this world is to walk according to the prince of the power of the air,” or that “the broad road is that which leadeth to destruction.” They have satisfied others; and therefore they have satisfied themselves.

But some take a far higher standard, even the law of God itself, (as far as they understand it,) and aim at obedience to the whole will of God. But they take only the letter of the law; and if they abstain from the actual commission of murder, adultery, and theft, they imagine that they have no reason to reproach themselves with any violation of the commandments which forbid those crimes. Hence, like the Young Man in the Gospel, they will recite the commandments, and say, “All these have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?” This was the source of Paul’s self-deception, in his unconverted state. He knew not the spirituality of the law; and therefore he imagined himself to be alive, whilst he was really dead, with respect to all spiritual obedience^a. He thought himself to be something, when he was nothing; and thereby deceived himself.]

2. From comparing ourselves with others—

[Some look at those who are of the same rank and age with themselves: and, if they fall not below them, they conclude that they are right. Others look at those rather who live without any particular regard to morals: and, from seeing a manifest superiority in themselves to these, they will with a self-complacent air say, in their hearts at least, if not with their lips, “I thank thee, O God, that I am not as other men are, or even as this Publican.” Others again will compare themselves with the religious world. They will select those who have in any respect dishonoured their holy profession, and hold them forth as a proper specimen of all. Or they will take the more defective part of a good character, and represent it as exhibiting a just picture of the man himself. In doing this too they will believe all they hear, without any examination or inquiry: they will make no allowances for any thing as arising out of peculiar circumstances: they overlook entirely all the humiliation and contrition which in a real saint follow the commission of a fault: they will go further still, and impute all this evil to wilful and deliberate hypocrisy: and then they will bless themselves that they are at least as good, if not better than those who make so much profession of godliness; yea, *therefore* better, because they make no such profession.

But to these we may apply what the Apostle said of the

^a Rom. vii. 9.

false teachers at Corinth; “They measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise^b.” For what have they to do with others? It is not by any comparative goodness that their character will be estimated. Whether they be better or worse than others, they are in God’s sight precisely what they are in themselves: and, whilst they form a judgment of themselves by the relative situation which they occupy in the scale of general goodness, they only deceive their own souls.]

3. From comparing our present with our former state—

[It may be, that at an early period of our lives we were gay and dissipated: and that since that time we have reformed, and become observant of many duties. Yet still we may be very far from a state that is pleasing and acceptable to God: we may even (and it is no uncommon case) be more odious in his eyes than before, by having become more inflated with pride and self-confidence, in proportion as we have reformed our external conduct. For what is this, but to exchange “fleshly for spiritual filthiness,” and to acquire the image of Satan in proportion as we have relinquished that of the beast? But, waving this circumstance, which may or may not exist, the question is, not what reformation we have experienced, but what yet remains to be reformed? It matters little that the outward conduct is changed, if the heart remains the same. If we are not “new creatures in Christ Jesus,” we have attained nothing to any good purpose: and, if we look with complacency on any change short of that, we fancy ourselves something when we are nothing, and fatally deceive ourselves.]

4. From judging under the influence of partiality and self-love—

[Self-love blinds us: it hides from us our faults; or puts such a specious gloss upon them, that they are scarcely discerned as faults. It magnifies our virtues too, and not unfrequently represents as virtues what in reality are grievous sins. If there be any point in our character that is more favourable, (as generosity, or benevolence, or any other good quality,) self-love represents that to us as constituting almost the whole of our character, and then fills us with self-complacency in the contemplation of it. Thus it was with the Pharisees of old, who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous,” whilst in the sight of God they were no better than “whited sepulchres.” And thus it will be with all of us, until God open

^b 2 Cor. x. 12.

our eyes to see things as they really are, and give us hearts to judge righteous judgment.]

But for this evil there is in our text,

II. A remedy prescribed—

God has given to us an unerring standard of right and wrong—

[In the Holy Scriptures, he has revealed to us his mind and will, and shewn us what is that state which becomes us, as creatures, and as sinners. As creatures, we ought to love him with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. As sinners, we ought to humble ourselves before him in dust and ashes; to lay hold on the covenant which he has made with us in the Son of his love; to seek for mercy solely through the atoning sacrifice of Christ; to live by faith on Christ, receiving out of his fulness as branches from the vine; and by the influences of his Spirit to bring forth fruit to his glory. And, to form a right estimate of our character, we must try ourselves by this standard: we must see how far we are observant of his law, and how far we are obedient to his Gospel.

But besides this written standard, we have a copy of all perfection set before us in the example of Christ. We see how ardent and uniform was his zeal for God, and how active and self-denying his love for man. We see him in all situations of difficulty; we behold all his tempers and dispositions tried to the uttermost by the perverseness and cruelty of men; and we see in every thing how to conduct ourselves towards God and man. In his example, we have a touchstone whereby to try our supposed virtues: and, whereinsoever we differ from him, or come short of him, (unless in those things which arose out of his mediatorial character,) we may assuredly conclude that we are wrong.

Further, though the word of God, and the example of Christ, are the only unerring standards of truth, we have yet further,—what is of great advantage to us,—the examples of men who were of like passions with ourselves. We see Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, all walking, as it were, before our eyes; and we learn from them how we ought to walk and to please God. If we take the life of Abraham, of Daniel, of the Apostle Paul; if we contemplate their unshaken faith, and unreserved obedience; and then inquire how we have demeaned ourselves under any circumstances which have borne an affinity with theirs; we may certainly attain a pretty correct knowledge of our state and character before God.]

By this standard then we should try ourselves—

[It is of use to all persons, and under all circumstances. From the king on the throne to the beggar on the dunghill, all may find it suitable to their condition. To it therefore we should refer the whole of our conduct, and by it “every one should prove his own work.” Every particular work should be tried by it. Whatever the work be, we should examine what the written word required of us, and see how far our work fell short of the true standard. We should bring it to the test, and inquire into *the principle* from which it flowed, *the manner* in which it was executed, and *the end* for which it was performed; and then form our judgment, after a candid and impartial survey of its defects.

But it is not our actions only that should be so proved: we should examine also the entire state and habit of our minds: for it is this, and this only, that will determine our real character before God. And who that does this will think highly of his own attainments? Who that considers what is that love which is due to the Supreme God; what is that gratitude which the Lord Jesus Christ calls for at our hands; what is that affiance which we should place in him; and what is that zeal which we should put forth in his service; who, I say, will then vaunt himself as somebody, and swell with self-preference and self-conceit? The remedy once brought into daily and habitual use, will soon cure the evil complained of in our text.]

What the Apostle thought of this remedy, appears from,

III. The prescription eulogized—

A more valuable prescription could not be given either,

1. As it respects our present happiness—

[To what purpose is it to be applauded by others, even though we were held forth as patterns of all that is great and excellent? It might please our vanity; but it would afford us no solid satisfaction, whilst we are afraid to bring our conduct to the only true test. What comfort would a merchant feel to hear that he was reputed rich, if his affairs were so embarrassed that he dared not examine his accounts, and knew not but that he was on the very verge of bankruptcy? So is the man, who, whilst he is extolled by his fellow-creatures, is averse to learn what is said of him by his God. On the contrary, the man who tries himself by the standard of God's word, and finds that, amidst innumerable defects, he

is on the whole upright before God, he “has his rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.” He lives not on the testimony of his fellow-creatures: his comfort is independent either of their censure or applause. He rejoices in the testimony of his own conscience, as the Apostle Paul did^c. He “has the witness in himself:” and “the Spirit of God also witnesses with his Spirit,” that he is a “child of God.” O what an advantage is this, under every situation and circumstance of life! Are we in a state of prosperity? We shall make no account of our wealth or honour in comparison of the testimony of a good conscience. Are we in adversity? Our spirit will be buoyant in a sea of troubles; we shall know assuredly that all things are working together for our good, and that, “light and momentary in themselves, they are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”]

2. As it respects our eternal welfare—

[Whatever others may think of us, or we may think of ourselves, it will not at all influence the judgment of our God: “for not he that commendeth himself will be approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth^d.” The works that are applauded of men, may be recorded in his book of remembrance as splendid sins: and the works that are condemned by men, may be put to our account as services greatly to be rewarded. The very same judgment which the written word pronounces now, our God will pronounce hereafter. Hence, in bringing ourselves continually to this standard, we know what will be approved in the last day, and what sentence to expect at the mouth of a righteous Judge. There will doubtless be many actions which will be erroneously judged by man, and the precise quality of which we ourselves also are at present unable to discover: but, whilst we are conscious of an unfeigned desire to please and honour God, we shall say with the Apostle, “It is a small matter to be judged of man’s judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self: but he that judgeth me is the Lord^e.” My own heart does not condemn me; and therefore I have confidence towards God^f.” Whilst practising this habit, we shall be attentive to every thing we do. We shall preserve a tenderness of conscience: we shall spy out readily any thing that has been amiss. We shall, from a sense of the imperfection of our very best deeds, wash them daily in the fountain of Christ’s blood, and never hope for the acceptance of them but through his atoning sacrifice, and his all-powerful intercession. Thus, whilst all, who refer

^c 2 Cor. i. 12.

^e 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

^d 2 Cor. x. 18.

^f 1 John iii. 20, 21.

their actions to any inferior standard, delude their own souls, and “treasure up wrath against the day of wrath,” the careful Christian attains a just knowledge of his own state, and accumulates “a weight of glory,” which “the Lord, the righteous Judge,” shall confer upon him in exact proportion to the services he has rendered to his God^g. Here we are called to bear the burthens of others; and frequently to groan under burthens that are unrighteously cast upon us: but in the day of judgment, both the one and the other of these will be removed from us, and we shall “bear that only which is properly our own:” “we shall reap precisely what we have sown: if we have sown to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption; and, if we have sown to the Spirit, we shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting^h.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who form too favourable an opinion of their state—

[Do not imagine that we wish unnecessarily to disturb your peace. We would to God that “your peace might flow down like a river!” All that we are anxious to do, is, to keep you from resting in undue security, and “saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace.” When we entreat you to stop and try yourselves, and to prove your own work, what do we but consult your truest happiness both in time and in eternity? We desire to bring every one of you to a state of holy joy, even to “a joy which no man can take from you,” “a rejoicing in yourself alone, and not in another.” Let me then say to you, as the Apostle does, “Let not any man think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but think soberlyⁱ :” and again, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves^k.” It is in this way only that you can attain self-knowledge, or be delivered from self-deception. Think what you will of yourselves, “you are nothing,” nor ever can be any thing, but poor, weak, guilty creatures, indebted to the free grace of God alone for all your hope and all your salvation. Even St. Paul, whilst declaring that “he was not a whit behind the very chiefest Apostles,” confessed that “he was nothing^l.” Let the same mind be in you, and you will find the salvation of the Gospel sweetly suited to your souls.]

2. Those who form too unfavourable an opinion of their state—

^g 1 Cor. iii. 8. Heb. xi. 26.

ⁱ Rom. xii. 3.

^k 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^h ver. 7, 8.

^l 2 Cor. xii. 11.

[Some there are, who, when they see how far they have departed from God, are ready to imagine, that they have sinned beyond the reach of mercy, and that, with respect to them, Christ has died in vain. But no man is warranted to say, that his state is desperate; nor ought any man to come to such a conclusion after the strictest search. There is one distinction which ought never to be forgotten: it is this; that whatever grounds sin affords for humiliation, it affords none for despondency. If there were not a sufficiency in the blood of Christ to cleanse from the guilt of sin, we might well despair: or, if there were not a sufficiency in the grace of Christ to rescue from the power of sin, we might justly say, There is no hope: but, whilst we are assured that Christ "is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him," we need not fear, but that if we go to him, he will receive us; and if we trust in him, he will glorify himself in our salvation. Attempt not then to hide from your own eyes the extremity of your guilt; nor, when it is revealed to you, indulge any desponding fears: but flee unto Christ, and lay hold on him, and cleave to him, and determine, that, if you perish, you will perish at the foot of his cross, trusting in his blood, and pleading with him that promise, "Whosoever cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."]

3. Those who are enabled to form a just estimate of their state—

[These persons are a perfect mystery to all around them. The world sees them humbling themselves as the very chief of sinners, and yet exulting under a sense of God's pardoning love: and how to reconcile this they know not. 'If,' say they, 'you are so vile, how can you rejoice? and, if you have such cause for joy, how is it that you yet sigh, and mourn, and weep, as if you were the vilest of mankind?' But it is this union of humility and confidence which characterizes the true Christian: and, the more eminent the Christian is, the more do both these graces flourish in his soul. Thus then, brethren, let it be with you: affix no limits to your self-abasement; for it is not possible for you ever to have too humiliating thoughts of yourselves: yet, on the other hand, let there be no limits to your confidence in Christ, as able, and willing to save the very chief of sinners. Yet, at the same time, do not imagine, that, because you are vile in yourselves, you are at liberty to indulge in sin; or because "in Christ you are complete," you are not under any necessity of practising universal holiness: these would be fatal errors indeed: were any such licence given you, "Christ would be a minister of sin." But this is far from being the case. It is true, that you are justified by

faith alone: but by your works will you be judged: and the measure of your works will be the certain measure of your reward.]

MMLXXXIX.

THE GROUND OF GOD'S FINAL DECISION.

Gal. vi. 7, 8. *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*

SIN and misery are often found to be nearly connected in this life; yet rewards and punishments are not always distributed according to man's actions. The necessity therefore of a future state of retribution is obvious and undeniable. This was discoverable in a measure by the light of reason; but revelation establishes the certainty of such a state. The inspired writers often urge the consideration of it as a motive to virtue. St. Paul is stating to the Galatians the duty of providing liberally for their pastors. He is aware that some might offer pleas and excuses for their neglect of this duty. He knew that some might even pretend a prior and more sacred obligation^a. He therefore cautions them against self-deception, and reminds them that God will hereafter pass sentence on us according to the real quality of our actions.

I. It is in vain to hope for salvation while we live in a neglect of religious duties—

It is common for men to offer pleas and excuses for their disregard of religion:

1. That a life of religion is *needless*—

[They see the world in a state of wickedness. They cannot believe that so many can be in danger of perishing. They forget that the course of this world is just such as Satan would have it^b. They recollect not our Lord's declaration

^a Mark vii. 11.

^b Eph. ii. 2.

respecting the broad and narrow way^c. They consider not that the care of the soul is the "one thing needful."]

2. That a life of religion is *impracticable*—

[They hear what holiness of heart and life God requires of us. They feel how unable they are of themselves to fulfil their duty. They therefore conclude, that it is impossible to serve God aright. At least they think that a religious life cannot consist with social duties. But they forget that the grace of Christ is all-sufficient^d: nor are they aware that that grace will stimulate us to every duty, whether civil or religious, social or personal.]

Besides these, they substitute other things in the place of religion :

1. Their good intentions—

[They purpose to amend their lives at some future period. They expect to find some "more convenient season" for repentance. They hope that their good designs, though never executed, will be accepted.]

2. Their moral lives—

[They are guilty of no very enormous crimes. They perform many commendable actions. They hope that such a life, though they know nothing of contrition, of faith in Christ, of delight in God, &c. will procure them admission to heaven.]

3. Their profession of certain truths—

[Many receive the doctrines of Christianity as a system of truth. They trust to the mere profession of these doctrines without experiencing their transforming efficacy. Thus they substitute "the form of godliness for the power of it."]

But no pleas or pretences can deceive God—

[To attempt to deceive God is, in fact, to "mock" him. It is to insult him, as though he were too ignorant to discern, too indifferent to regard, or too weak to punish, hypocrisy. But God cannot be deceived; nor will he be mocked.]

Let none then deceive themselves with vain expectations.

II. Our final state will be exactly answerable to our present conduct—

Under the metaphor of a sower the text affords a striking discrimination of character :

^c Matt. vii. 13, 14.

^d Phil. iv. 13.

Some “sow to the flesh”—

[To sow to the flesh, is to seek in the first place our carnal ease and interests. This we may do notwithstanding we are free from gross sins. Every one comes under this description who “sets his affections on things below.”]

They whose life is so occupied will “reap corruption”—

[The *present* enjoyments they will have are both corruptible and defiling. The *future* recompence will be everlasting destruction^e. This is elsewhere affirmed in the plainest terms^f.]

Others “sow to the Spirit”—

[The Holy Spirit invariably inclines men to the love of God, and of holiness. The new nature of the regenerate affects also spiritual objects and employments. To sow to the Spirit therefore is to seek and delight in spiritual things.]

They who do this will reap everlasting life—

[A life of devotedness to God can never issue in misery. God has promised that it shall terminate in glory^g.]

Thus, not our pleas and pretences, but our life and conduct, will determine our eternal state—

[Our harvest will accord with the seed we sow. These different ends are inseparable from the different means^h. The punishment, however, will be as wages earned; the reward as a gift bestowedⁱ.]

INFER—

1. What extreme folly is it to live regardless of God and our own souls!

[No husbandman expects to reap wheat, when he has sown only tares. How absurd then to hope for heaven while we seek not after it! Let us be convinced of our folly, and learn wisdom even from the children of this world.]

2. How absurd would it be to be diverted from our duty by any difficulties we may meet with in the discharge of it!

[The husbandman does not regard inclemencies of weather, much less would he be deterred from his work by the

^e This is evidently the import of *corruption* in this place; because it is opposed to *everlasting life*. It implies that state of soul which most corresponds with the corruption of the body.

^f Rom. viii. 13.

^g Rom. vi. 22. and viii. 13.

^h Rom. ii. 6—10.

ⁱ Rom. vi. 23.

advice or ridicule of the ignorant and supine. Shall *we* then be discouraged, whose seed-time is so precarious, and whose harvest is so important? Let all go forward, “sowing in tears that they may reap in joy.”]

MMXC.

STEADFASTNESS IN DUTIES.

Gal. vi. 9. *Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

THE way of duty is difficult, while that of sin is easy^a. After we have received grace, we are still prone to depart from God; but the prospect of an happy issue of our labours is a strong support. The Gospel encourages us to expect a certain and seasonable recompence.

We have here,

I. A word of caution—

Well-doing respects every part of a Christian's duty. We may apprehend ourselves weary in it, when we are not really so. We are not *necessarily* so, because our affections are not so lively as they once were—

[Age and infirmity may occasion a stupor of the mind: a more enlarged view of our own depravity may cast us down. Love itself may grow in some respects, even while its ardour *seems* to abate^b.]

We are not *necessarily* so, because our corruptions *appear* to have increased—

[When we are first awakened, we know but little of our own hearts. As we proceed, the Lord discovers to us more of our hidden abominations^c. The discovery of them, as of objects in a dark place, argues only more light from heaven.]

We are not *necessarily* so, because we do not find enlargement in prayer—

^a A learned prelate speaks admirably to this purpose:—“Vice is first pleasing; then easy; then delightful; then frequent; then habitual; then confirmed: then the man is impenitent; then he is obstinate; then he resolves never to repent; and then he is damned.” Jer. Taylor's Serm. p. 260.

^b Phil. i. 9. ^c This may be illustrated by Ezek. viii. 6, 13, 15.

[Excess of trouble may, for a time, distract and overwhelm the soul. Our Lord himself seems to have experienced somewhat of this^d. Our prayers, perhaps, are never more acceptable, than when they are offered in broken accents, in sighs, and groans^e.]

But we have reason to apprehend that we are weary in well-doing,

1. When we do not make a progress in our religious course—

[We cannot stand still in religion: we must advance or decline. There are seasons when we grow rather in humility than in the more lively graces; but if we neither shoot our branches upward, nor our roots downward, it must be ill with us^f.]

2. When we are habitually formal in religious duties—

[The best of men find cause to lament an *occasional* deadness; but no true Christian can be satisfied in such a state^g. Habitual formality therefore proves, either that we have never been truly in earnest, or that we are in a state of miserable declension^h.]

3. When we do not carry religion into our worldly business—

[As long as we are in the world, we must perform the duties of our station; but if our souls be prospering, we shall maintain a sense of religion even when we are not actually engaged in the offices of itⁱ.]

4. When our consciences are not tender—

[It is essential to a Christian to hate evil^k: he strives to “avoid even the appearance of evil.” He will in no wise allow one sinful temper or inclination^l.]

We cannot be too much on our guard against such a state.

To confirm what has been spoken, let me add,

II. A word of encouragement—

^d John xii. 27.

^e Rom. viii. 26.

^f 2 Pet. iii. 18. Heb. vi. 7, 8.

^g Nine times in the 119th Psalm does David cry, “Quicken me, O Lord”—

^h Phil. iii. 3.

ⁱ Prov. xxiii. 17.

^k Rom. xii. 9.

^l Acts xxiv. 16.

If we persevere in our exertions, we shall reap the fruit of our labour—

[There will be a harvest to all who labour in God's field. It may not come so soon as we would desire; but it shall come, as the earthly harvests, "in due season." We must, however, wait God's appointed time. If we faint, we shall lose all that we have before wrought^m: but if we continue patiently in well-doing, we shall succeed at lastⁿ.]

Our prospects of the harvest may well ENCOURAGE us to persevere, since it will be,

1. Certain—

[The husbandman endures many toils for an uncertain harvest: his hopes may be blasted in a variety of ways. But God has pledged himself, that his faithful servants shall be rewarded^o: nor shall either men or devils prevent the accomplishment of his promise^p.]

2. Glorious—

[What are all the harvests that ever were gathered since the creation of the world, in comparison of that which the Christian will reap? Shall we faint then with *such* a prospect in view?]

3. Everlasting—

[However abundant our harvests here may be, we must renew the same process, in order to supply our returning wants: but when once we have reaped the heavenly harvest, we shall "rest from our labours" for evermore. If then a year of toil be considered as compensated by a transient supply, shall not an eternity of happiness be thought worth our care, during the short period of human life? Do any, that are now in glory, regret the pains they bestowed to get there? Let us "be followers of them," and we shall soon participate their bliss^q.]

^m 2 John, ver. 8. Heb. x. 38.

ⁿ Rom. ii. 7.

^o Heb. vi. 10.

^p Prov. xi. 18.

^q Heb. vi. 12.

MMXCI.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

Gal. vi. 14. *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*

THE Christian, in whatever he does, is characterized by singleness of eye and simplicity of mind.

All others, even when they appear most zealous for God, have sinister and selfish ends in view. This may be seen in the Judaizing teachers, whilst they were insisting on the observance of circumcision and the Jewish ritual. They wished to have it thought that they were actuated only by a conscientious sense of duty to Moses, and to God: but there were other secret motives by which they were impelled: they were themselves preachers of the Gospel; but knowing how obnoxious both to Jews and Gentiles the simple preaching of the cross was, whilst the blending of certain observances with it was palatable to every mind, they sought to avoid the persecution which they knew that a simple exhibition of Christ crucified would bring upon them. They had an eye also to their own glory: for they affected to be leaders of a party in the Church, and laboured to exalt themselves by augmenting the number of their followers. That they were not actuated by a real desire to approve themselves to God, was evident from hence, that they, notwithstanding all their endeavours to enforce the observance of the law on others, did not keep the law themselves. But all such corrupt practices St. Paul abhorred; and, whilst he disdained to seek his own glory, he was proof against the fear of man, and laboured only to advance the glory of his Divine Master, and the salvation of those to whom he ministered: "*They*," says he, "who constrain you to be circumcised, desire to make a fair shew in the flesh:" "but God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world!"

In this commendation of the cross of Christ, we behold,

I. His views of its excellency—

By "the cross of Christ," is here meant the doctrine of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. This he preached, and it was the great subject of all his ministrations. Though it was "to the Jews a

stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness," yet he would "know nothing else^a," and "glory in nothing else." He gloried in it,

1. As displaying such wonders of love and mercy to the world at large—

[Here was a plan of salvation suited to, and sufficient for, the necessities of the whole world. All were involved in one common ruin: all needed an atonement to be offered for their sins: the whole universe could not present one capable of expiating their guilt; the highest archangel was as incompetent to it as was the blood of bulls and goats. But God, of his infinite mercy, had devised a way: he had entered into covenant with his only-begotten Son: he had agreed with him, that, if HE would assume our nature, and "make his soul an offering for sin," his sacrifice should be accepted in their behalf, and he should have from amongst the fallen race of Adam a seed, who should serve him, and enjoy him for ever^b. This stupendous plan has been executed: the Lord Jesus Christ has "been made in the likeness of men, and has become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross:" and, having "borne our sins in his own body on the tree," and been exalted to the right hand of God as the Head and Forerunner of his people, he now offers salvation unto all freely, "without money and without price." The persons sent out and commissioned by him to preach his Gospel, are empowered to declare, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them^c." To every living man is this message sent, with a full assurance, that "they who believe in Christ shall never perish, but shall have eternal life^d."

Now in this wonderful mystery St. Paul saw such honour reflected on all the Divine perfections, and such blessedness secured to man, that he could not but glory in it, and determine never to glory in any thing else.]

2. As making such ample provision for his own soul—

[St. Paul felt himself to be the very "chief of sinners," and deserving of God's heaviest indignation. But this Saviour had revealed himself to him, even in the midst of all his wickedness; and by a signal act of grace had not only pardoned his sins, but had appointed him to preach to others that salvation, of which he was so remarkable a monument. By the manifestation of Christ to his soul, he was assured of mercy and acceptance with God. From that moment he no more

^a 1 Cor. ii. 2. ^b Isai. liii. 10. ^c 2 Cor. v. 19. ^d John iii. 16.

doubted of his own salvation, than he did of his existence : and the blessing which was thus imparted to him, he had been the means of imparting unto others, even to hundreds and thousands of the Gentile world. Could he then be insensible of the value of that which had filled his own soul with such peace and joy, and which, through his ministrations, had diffused such unspeakable blessings all around him? No: he could not but commend to others what had been so effectual for his own benefit, and glory in the cross as “all his salvation, and all his desire.”]

As an especial reason for glorying in the cross, he mentions,

II. His experience of its power—

The words “by *whom*,” should rather be translated, “by *which* ;” for it is to *the doctrine* of the cross as received into his soul, and not to Christ’s personal agency upon his soul, that he traced the effects produced.

The world was in the Apostle’s eyes as an object that was crucified ; himself also being as one crucified in respect of it—

[The image here used is very remarkable, and deserving of particular attention, “The world was crucified to him.” A person dying upon a cross, how dear so ever he may have been to us, is no longer an object of desire. As soon as he has surrendered up his life, if his body be given to us, we bury it out of our sight. We no longer look to him for any of those comforts which are derived from social intercourse : all relation to him, all dependence on him, all satisfaction in him, are dissolved: every tie that once bound us together is broken, and “we know him no more.” The Apostle further adds, that “he also was crucified to the world.” This does not mean, that the world despised *him*, and wished *him* buried out of its sight (that was indeed true ; but it is not the truth that is here intimated) : the expression imports, that, whilst the world was as a crucified object in his eyes, he beheld every thing in it as a man would do who was himself dying on a cross. He may have loved the world in ever so high a degree ; but he now loves it no more. He may have sought its pleasures, its riches, and its honours, with the most insatiable ardour ; but he has now no desire after any thing that is in it. He feels himself dying ; and he has now no wish but to improve his few remaining moments, for his own benefit, and the benefit of those around him. Take the penitent thief as an example. If crowns and kingdoms could have been given him

for the few remaining hours that he had to live, they would have been of no value whatever in his eyes.

Now thus the Apostle looked upon the world and every thing in it. There was nothing in it that he desired: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," were all lighter than vanity, in his estimation: he had now no longer any taste for them: he felt that, whether his life was of longer or shorter continuance, he had nothing to do, but to honour God, and benefit his fellow-creatures, as far as he should have opportunity, and seek the salvation of his own soul. All that the world could either give or take away, was "counted by him as dung, that he might win Christ, and be found in him."]

And whence was it that he attained such extraordinary deadness to the world?

[This holy feeling was wrought in him altogether by the cross of Christ; which brought such glories to his view, as eclipsed all sublunary good; and filled his soul with such joys as rendered all earthly satisfactions worthless and distasteful as the husks of swine. This it was which raised him above those vain hopes with which the Judaizing teachers were animated, and above those unworthy fears with which their fidelity to God was assailed. A sense of "love to his Redeemer constrained him;" and, when menaced with all that the world could inflict, he could say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but finish my course with joy, and fulfil the ministry committed to me." Nor was this a vain boast: his whole life testified, that it was his actual experience; and that the doctrine which formed the only basis of his hopes, had a transforming effect, such as no other principles under heaven could produce.]

But we must not suppose this state of mind to be peculiar to the Apostle: it is produced invariably by the cross of Christ, wherever it is surveyed and gloried in as it ought to be. We may SEE therefore from hence,

1. How sublime are the Christian's views!

[The cross of Christ is that, and that alone, in which every Christian under heaven will glory. The very words of our text afford the best comment on that description which the Apostle gives of the cross of Christ, when he calls it, "The wisdom of God, and the power of God." So unfathomable are the counsels of Divine Wisdom contained in it, that all the angels of heaven are searching into it, with a thirst that is insatiable: and such is its efficacy, that nothing can withstand its

influence. By this then, you, my brethren, may judge whether you be Christians in deed and in truth, or whether ye be such in name only. A nominal Christian is contented with *approving* of the way of salvation by a crucified Redeemer: the true Christian *loves* it, *delights* in it, *glories* in it, and *shudders* at the thought of *glorying* in any thing else. Say, brethren, are such *your* views, and such *your* feelings? Do you see how base and unworthy it would be to glory in any thing else? Does your spirit rise with indignation at the thought of so requiting your adorable Redeemer? Be assured, it will be thus with you, if your hearts are truly enlightened, and if you have “learned of the Father as the truth is in Jesus.”]

2. How heavenly his life !

[He is *in* the world; but “he is not *of* it: he has overcome the world; and this is the victory by which he has overcome it, even his faith.” “His treasure is in heaven;” and “his conversation is there also.” Behold him, and you will see “a man of God;” a man “born from above;” a man “filled with the Holy Ghost;” a man “walking as Christ himself walked.” In Christ you see the figure which is used in our text completely illustrated. “He had not even where to lay his head;” yet, “when the people would have taken him, to make him a king, he withdrew, and hid himself from them.” In the primitive Christians, too, you see the same spirit: for “they were not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world.” Aspire *ye* then, beloved, after this high and holy attainment. Walk ye in a holy indifference to the world: shew yourselves superior to all the things of time and sense. “Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.” Let all your joys flow from the contemplation of his cross. Thus shall you “dwell in God, and God in you:” you shall be “one with God, and God with you:” and the very instant that the ties between the world and you shall be finally dissolved by death, you shall soar as on eagles’ wings, to take possession of the crowns and kingdoms that await you in a better world.]

EPHESIANS.

MMXCII.

THANKS TO GOD FOR HIS SOVEREIGN GRACE AND MERCY.

Eph. i. 3—12. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*

IN our progress through the Holy Scriptures, we are necessitated to investigate, in its turn, every doctrine of our holy religion. There are indeed some doctrines which appear to be almost wholly proscribed: but we do not conceive ourselves at liberty to pass over any part of the sacred records as improper for discussion, provided we enter into it with

the humility and modesty that become us. It is undeniable that the Apostles mention occasionally, and without the smallest appearance of hesitation, the doctrines of predestination and election: and therefore we are bound to explore the meaning of the inspired writers in reference to these passages, as well as to any others. We are aware that great difficulties attend the explanation of these doctrines; (though certainly not greater than attend the denial of them;) and we are aware also, that they are open to abuse: but there is no doctrine which has not its difficulties; nor any which has not been abused: and, that we may not be supposed to entertain an undue partiality for these obnoxious tenets, or to wish to establish them on inadequate grounds, we have selected a large portion of Scripture which cannot easily be perverted; and which is indeed so plain, that it speaks for itself. We shall be careful also to bring them forward precisely in the way in which they are declared by the Apostles themselves, that is, not in a speculative and controversial way, but in a practical manner, as incentives to holy gratitude and obedience.

St. Paul, under a deep sense of the mercies vouchsafed to himself and to the whole Church at Ephesus, breaks forth into the devoutest acknowledgments to that God from whom they had flowed, and to whom all possible thanks and praise were due.

In considering his words, we shall shew,

I. What are those blessings which we have received from our God—

“He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings”—

[The Ephesian Church, though chiefly composed of Gentiles, consisted in part of Jews also^a. And, though it is possible there might be some hypocrites there, as well as in other Churches, St. Paul does not stop to make distinctions of that kind, but speaks of them all in the judgment of charity, as real

^a Acts xviii. 19, 20, 24, 28. with ver. 11, 12, 13. of our text, where the distinction is made between “*we*” Jews “who first trusted in Christ,” and “*ye*” Gentiles who believed afterwards. See also Gal. ii. 16—18.

Christians, and partakers of all the blessings which by their profession they were supposed to possess. As believers, they had been blessed with "*spiritual* blessings in *heavenly* things^b," widely different from those which were possessed by any "*natural* man," and from those which the *earthly* and *carnal* Jews expected their Messiah to bestow. Of these, some of the principal are here enumerated.

God has *adopted us into his family—dealt with us as children—and given to us the inheritance of children.*

Once the believer was "afar off" from God, being an "alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:" but by an act of rich mercy and grace he has been adopted by God, and made to stand in the relation to him of a child to a father. Though he neither has any thing, nor ever can have any thing, that can recommend him to God, yet "is he accepted" to the Divine favour, having all his past iniquities "forgiven," and his soul washed from all its stains, in "the Redeemer's blood." Being thus brought into the nearest relation to God, he is treated, "not as a servant, who knows not what his lord doeth; but as a son," who may fitly be made acquainted with all his Father's will. To him is that stupendous mystery made known, that, in the time appointed of the Father, the whole intelligent creation of men and angels, who were once of one family, but were separated by the fall of man, shall be brought once more under the same Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, who at first created them, and to whom originally they paid all due allegiance. As to men, there should be no difference between them in this respect: the common Father of all would equally receive all, whether Jews or Gentiles, and incorporate them all into one body, who should equally and without any distinction be partakers of his grace, and heirs of his glory. For all of them without exception, provided only they believe in him, he has provided an inheritance, to which, on the instant that they believe in him, they become entitled, and which, after the period fixed for their abode on earth, they shall possess to all eternity.]

These spiritual blessings are given to us "in Christ"—

[All of them without exception are the purchase of his blood, the fruit of his intercession, and the gifts of his grace. They are all treasured up in him; and when He is given to us, they are made over to us, as the ore in the mine. They were all given to Him, in the first instance, as our head and representative, and can be possessed by us only as we are

^b See the margin.

found in him. Are we chosen? it is “in him.” Are we predestinated to the adoption of children? it is “in him.” Are we accepted? it is “in him.” Are we forgiven? it is “in him.” Are we brought into one body? it is “in him.” Have we obtained an inheritance? it is “in him.” Are we “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, as the earnest of that inheritance?” it is “in him.” Are we blessed with all spiritual blessings? it is “in him,” and in him alone. O that we were more sensible of our obligations to Christ in reference to these things! Is it not surprising, that any one can read the passage before us, and overlook Christ, who throughout the whole of it is represented as the “All in all?” Let this be borne in mind; that, whilst all is traced to the Father as the original source, all must be referred to Christ as the procuring cause, and be received from Christ as the fountain-head: and it is only by receiving Christ himself that we can ever partake of any one of his benefits.]

Having noticed the benefits given to us in Christ, we proceed to shew,

II. In what way he has communicated them to us—

On this depends, in a great measure, the debt of gratitude we owe him. If in the bestowment of them he has been forestalled by earnest solicitations on our part, and been prevailed upon only by the great and meritorious services which we have rendered to him, then, though we have reason to bless him, we have also reason to bless ourselves, and may justly claim for ourselves some part of the honour of our own salvation. But he has communicated these blessings to us,

1. In a way of sovereignty—

[He is a Sovereign; and it is only of his own will and pleasure that he has formed any creature whatsoever. We feel his sovereignty in this respect. Let any man ask himself, ‘Why was I created at all? Why formed a man, and not a beast? Why was I born of Christian, and not of heathen, parents? Why under the meridian splendour of Gospel light, and not in the darker ages of the Church? Why was I preserved in life, whilst millions have closed their eyes upon this world as soon as they were brought into it? Why was I endued with intelligence, whilst so many are in a state of idiocy, and devoid of reason?’ To all such questions there is but one answer; “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” And this is the true answer that must be given to all inquiries

respecting the spiritual blessings which he has bestowed upon us: they are all the fruit of his free and sovereign grace: "He has chosen us from before the foundation of the world," and "predestinated us to the enjoyment of them." He has done this purely "of his own will and pleasure:" and in doing it, he has consulted nothing but his own glory: it has been "according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace^c." Yet, whilst his predestination of us is the result of "his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself," and can be referred to nothing but "his own purpose and grace," we are not to imagine that he is actuated by a *mere arbitrary* volition; for it is a volition founded in "counsel^d," though the reasons by which he is actuated are unknown to us. Were this doctrine dependent only on a single expression, we should speak of it with the more diffidence: but, in the passage before us, it is as the warp, which pervades the whole piece: it cannot, like the woof, be separated, and made to give way to some more palatable sentiment: it is impossible for any man to read the passage with an unprejudiced mind, and not to acknowledge, that this is its obvious import; and that nothing but the most determined efforts of ingenious and laboured criticism can extract from it any other meaning.]

2. In a way of holiness—

[One ground on which many object to the doctrines of election and predestination is, that these doctrines are hostile to the interests of morality. But for such an objection there is no real foundation. On the contrary, they are the greatest security of a life of holiness, seeing that they have insured to us the attainment of holiness as a preparation for the ultimate possession of glory. God, we are told, has "chosen us:" but to what has he chosen us? to salvation independent of holiness? No; but to salvation in the way of holiness: He has chosen us, "*that we should be holy*, and without blame before him in love." Here it deserves particular attention, that God has not chosen us because *we were* holy, or because he foresaw *we should become* holy, but *in order that we might be* holy: he has chosen us to holiness as *the means*, as well as to glory as *the end*. He has ordained both the means and the end; and *the end solely by the means*. Hence, wherever election and predestination are spoken of, they are spoken of in this view, as having respect to holiness, and as assuring to us the attainment of holiness: God has chosen us "through sanctification of the Spirit, as well as through the belief of the truth^e," and has "predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son^f."

^c ver. 5, 6.

^d ver. 9, 11. with 2 Tim. i. 9.

^e 2 Thess. ii. 13. 1 Pet. i. 2.

^f Rom. viii. 29.

Let this be duly considered, and it will remove the greatest obstruction in our minds to the reception of these deep mysterious truths. When once we see, that they secure infallibly the attainment of holiness in the way to glory, and that no man is entitled to think himself one of God's elect, any farther than the holiness of his life bears testimony to him, we shall soon renounce our prejudices, and willingly concede to sovereign grace the whole glory of our salvation.]

3. In a way of wisdom and prudence—

[Truly this great salvation is the most stupendous effort both of wisdom and prudence; of wisdom, in its contrivance, and of prudence, in its administration. How wonderfully does it mark God's indignation against sin, even at the moment that it extends mercy to the sinner; since it shews the sinner, and constrains him to acknowledge, that, if the wrath due to him had not been borne by his Surety, he never could have been saved at all. It shews him farther, that in this way of salvation through the sacrifice of the Son of God, all the Divine perfections are glorified; insomuch that, whilst the claims of justice and mercy appear to oppose each other, they so harmonize together, that justice is exercised in a way of mercy, and mercy in a way of justice. Further, in this way of salvation the soul of the believer is so penetrated with wonder and with love, that he cannot but yield himself up unreservedly to God, and count a thousand lives too little to consecrate to his service, or to sacrifice for his glory. Nor is there less of prudence in the administration of it, than there is of wisdom in its contrivance: for, notwithstanding it is dispensed in a sovereign way altogether according to God's good pleasure, he never interferes with the liberty of the human will, nor ever draws any one but by "the cords of a man." It is by presenting truth to the mind, and motives to the heart, that he overcomes men, and "makes them willing in the day of his power." Infinitely various are the ways in which he dispenses his blessings: and even at this time his people are able to see most unsearchable wisdom in the way in which he has dealt with them, so as to make them see in the clearest light the extent of their obligations to him, and to furnish them with songs of praise, which each is ready to think he shall sing the loudest of any in the kingdom of heaven. Moreover, so infallible are the means he uses, that he never failed in any one instance to accomplish in any soul the purposes of his grace, or to carry on and perfect the work he had begun. Well then may it be said, in reference to "the riches of his grace" which he has dispensed to us, that "he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are not able to receive these mysterious truths—

[We are far from thinking that the doctrines of election and predestination are of primary and fundamental importance. We well know that many eminently pious persons have not been able to receive them: and we have no doubt but that a person may serve God most acceptably, though he should not have an insight into these mysterious truths. We only ask, that you will be content to wave them for the present, and not set yourselves against them, as too many are apt to do. If you have not a preparation of mind for the reception of them, you will only perplex yourselves by dwelling upon them, and give advantage to Satan to distress your minds. Be content to receive for the present the fundamental doctrines of repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and seek to experience them in their full extent. Contemplate the blessings with which God the Father hath blessed you through the mediation of his Son; and ever bear in mind, that you are indebted for them all to the Father, as the original source of all; to the Son, as procuring them for you by the virtue of his death; and to the Holy Spirit, as the great agent by whom they are communicated to your souls. Enjoy them in this view, and bless God for them in this view, and “what else you know not now, you shall know hereafter.”]

2. Those who have embraced them, and found delight in them—

[Enjoy them for yourselves; but do not unnecessarily obtrude them upon others. Give milk to babes, and strong meat to those only who are of age to digest it. Be careful too that you do not in any respect abuse them, as the habit of too many is. The decrees of God do not supersede the necessity of fear and watchfulness on your part. The hour that you begin to relax your diligence, from an idea that God will carry on his work in you at all events, you provoke God to abandon you to yourselves, and to give you up to the delusions of your own hearts. It is by your lives only that you can know your election of God^g: and if you are not making advancement in holiness, you have no reason whatever to hope that you shall ever attain to glory; seeing it is by the *means* only that you can ever attain the *end*. If you would make a legitimate improvement of these doctrines, use them as means of exciting the deeper gratitude to God. Trace up to God's electing love and predestinating grace every blessing you either enjoy or

hope for : and get your hearts more in unison with that of the Apostle, when he burst forth into that song of praise, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ !” Then shall you find that these truths, which are a stumbling-block to many, shall to you be as marrow and fatness to your souls.]

MMXCIII.

THE WISDOM OF GOD IN REDEMPTION.

Eph. i. 7, 8. *In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace ; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence.*

IN no part of the inspired volume are the wonders of redemption more fully opened, than in the passage before us. The pardon of sin, adoption into God’s family, and a participation of eternal glory, are all distinctly specified as blessings which under the Gospel we enjoy : and all are traced to Christ as the procuring cause, and to the Father as the prime source, from the riches of whose grace they flow, and to the praise of whose glory they are all ordained — — — But as the subject would be endless if we entered into it in this general view, we shall limit our observations to the words which we have just read, and notice from them,

I. The substance of the Gospel—

“In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.” Here notice,

1. What is implied in this declaration—

[It is here supposed that we are in a *state of bondage* to sin and Satan, and *under guilt and condemnation* on account of sin. And this but too justly describes the condition of every child of man. We are in a state of bondage to sin and Satan — — — And we are under guilt and condemnation on account of sin — — — We cannot more truly mark the state of man, than by comparing it with that of the fallen angels. They fell ; and for their sins were cast out of heaven, and consigned over to merited punishment in hell, where they are “reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the

great day." The difference between them and us is this: *they* are actually suffering the punishment of their sins; *we* are respite for a season: *they* are irremediably doomed to perdition; for *us* a remedy is provided, so that we may yet have redemption and forgiveness, if we seek it in God's appointed way.

Labour, I pray you, to realize this idea in your minds: for it is only by apprehending justly your condition without the Gospel, that you can be prepared for a participation of its blessings.]

2. What is expressed—

["Redemption" is provided for us, and "forgiveness" is offered to us, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and "through the blood" of his cross. The Lord Jesus Christ has, by his own obedience unto death, "obtained eternal redemption for us," having suffered in his own person all that was due to our sins, and having so fulfilled the law in our stead, as to bring in an everlasting righteousness, whereby we may be justified. In Him are these blessings treasured up for us, and "out of his fulness may be received by us." By believing in him, we become interested in all that he has done and suffered for us, and attain the actual possession of the blessings he has purchased for us — — —

This is, in few words, the sum and substance of the Gospel; as St. John has plainly told us; "This is the record, (the Gospel record,) that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life^a."]

The point to which we would more particularly turn your attention, is,

II. The character of the Gospel—

It is a dispensation,

1. "Rich in grace"—

[All "the glorious riches of God's grace" are here displayed. Consider the means by which this redemption is procured; even by the incarnation and death of God's only-begotten Son — — — Consider the persons for whom it is provided: not for angels, (they are left to reap for ever the bitter consequences of their sin;) but for men, who were an order of beings far inferior to them — — — Consider how it is that any become interested in this redemption: it is in consequence of their having been from all eternity elected and

^a 1 John v. 11, 12.

predestinated to it by the sovereign and unmerited grace of God — — — From first to last it is all of grace; and designed of God to exhibit to the whole universe, through all ages, “the exceeding riches of his grace^b.” Let any one compare the state of the fallen angels in the lake of fire, and of the redeemed saints that are around the throne of God, and view the wonders of grace which have been wrought in favour of the redeemed; and then he will be able in some measure to comprehend the character of the Gospel, as a dispensation of grace.]

2. “Abundant in wisdom and prudence”—

[In order to render the salvation of man consistent with the perfections of the Deity, justice must be satisfied, and truth be kept inviolate, by the punishment of sin. But if sin be punished, how could the sinner be saved? This was a problem which not all the angels in heaven could solve. But God, by sending his own Son to be our substitute and surety, has removed the difficulty. Sin has been punished to the full *in him*: and the law, both in its penalties and requirements, has been fulfilled in him: so that mercy may flow down to us in perfect consistency both with law and justice; and “God may be just, and yet the justifier” of sinful man — — — Indeed the law is the more magnified, in having executed its sentence against a person of such infinite dignity; and mercy is the more exalted, in being exercised at such a cost as the blood of God’s co-equal, co-eternal Son — — — Here is indeed “the wisdom of God in a mystery:” and well may Christ be called in this view, “The wisdom of God, and the power of God.”]

APPLICATION—

1. Seek to appreciate this blessed Gospel—

[We are grievously negligent in relation to this matter. Men will labour with indefatigable industry to comprehend the laws of nature; but are shamefully remiss in exploring the mysteries of grace, which are revealed to us in the Gospel — — — Let your minds be intent on this subject, which can never be adequately comprehended, either by men or angels — — —]

2. Labour to adorn it—

[Let the character of the Gospel be exemplified in you. Is it full of grace? Be ye full of praise and thanksgiving; ever cleaving to him by whom your redemption has been wrought, and adoring him by whom the Saviour himself was sent into the world — — — And is it full of wisdom? Do ye

^b Eph. ii. 7.

shew how harmoniously every grace may be exercised by you; and how perfectly all the attributes of the Deity, as far as they can be communicated to so frail a creature, may be transferred to, and illustrated by, his redeemed people — — —]

MMXCIV.

THE SEALING OF THE SPIRIT.

Eph. i. 13, 14. *In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

THE blessings which we receive through Christ are innumerable. Many are mentioned in the preceding part of this chapter. One of the last and greatest blessings which we receive in this life, is the sealing of the Holy Spirit. This was vouchsafed to many of the saints at Ephesus.

We shall shew,

I. What the sealing of the Spirit is—

The metaphor of sealing conveys no inadequate idea of the Spirit's operations—

[A seal stamps its own image on the wax that is impressed by it; and marks the thing sealed to be the property of him that sealed it: and the Holy Spirit forms all the lineaments of the Divine image on the soul that is sealed by him; and shews that it belongs to God.]

But the text itself affords us the best explanation of this term—

[The future inheritance of the saints consists in a perfect conformity to God's image, and a perfect enjoyment of his love. The sealing of the Spirit is an "earnest of that inheritance," or, in other words, *a part* of that inheritance already vouchsafed to the soul, and *a pledge* that the remainder shall in due time be given to it. This gift of the Spirit is to be continued to the church till the final consummation of all things^a. The experience of individuals may vary with respect

^a The Church is Christ's "purchased possession," Acts xx. 28. And its complete "redemption" from all the penal effects of sin will be at the day of judgment, Rom. viii. 23.

to it; but there shall always be some in the Church who possess and enjoy it.]

We are also informed respecting,

II. The manner in which it is effected—

The *agent* is none other than the Holy Ghost—

[It is not in man's power to sanctify his own soul: nor can any one assure himself that he is the Lord's. To impart these blessings is the prerogative of God alone^b.]

The *subjects* of this work are true believers—

[An unbeliever cannot possibly be sealed; because the Holy Spirit would never mark those as God's property, who do not really belong to him: nor are persons usually sealed on their first believing in Christ. This higher state of sanctification and assurance is reserved for those, who, "after having believed," have maintained a close walk with God. They must first be "in Christ," and then for Christ's sake this benefit shall be vouchsafed unto them.]

The *means* by which it is effected, are the promises—

[We do not presume to limit the Spirit's operations; but his usual method of sealing is by applying the "promises" to the soul^c. Of themselves, the promises can accomplish nothing; but, through his divine power, they have a comforting and transforming efficacy^d.]

The Apostle further specifies,

III. Its proper tendency and operation—

The sealing of the Spirit will never elate a man with pride—

[It may seem indeed that such distinguishing mercies would puff us up; but their invariable effect is to humble those who receive them. All the saints of old abased themselves in proportion as they were favoured of God^e. Nor can there be any stronger evidence that a work is not of God, than its producing a contrary effect upon us.]

It is intended solely to honour and glorify God—

Every work of grace should lead the mind to God as the author of it; and the more exalted the mercy, the more powerful should this effect be. Now this, above all, administers to

^b 2 Cor. i. 21, 22.

^d 2 Pet. i. 4.

^c 1 Cor. ii. 4. 1 Thess. i. 5.

^e Job xlii. 5, 6. and Isai. vi. 5.

us the greatest cause of thankfulness, and will certainly incline us to love and serve him from whom it has been derived.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are ignorant of this sublime subject—

[To many, alas! the sealing of the Spirit is mere foolishness; but those who account it so, “speak evil of things that they understand not.” Let us seek to experience it ourselves, instead of censuring those who do.]

2. To those who desire to be sealed—

[God is willing to bestow this blessing on all who seek it. If we possess it not, we should inquire what there is in us which has occasioned God to withhold it from us. We should beg of God to take away from us that hardness of heart which incapacitates us for it, and should live more on the promises, that by them it may be imparted to our souls.]

3. To those who are sealed—

[What a mercy is it, that you, who might long since have been sealed for condemnation, have, according to the good pleasure of God, been sealed for heaven! Be thankful to God for this unspeakable gift: be careful too that you grieve not him by whom you have been sealed^f; but improve the promises yet further for your progressive advancement in true holiness^g.]

^f Eph. iv. 30.

^g 2 Cor. vii. 1.

MMXCV.

THE SPIRIT'S INFLUENCES AS A SPIRIT OF WISDOM.

Eph. i. 15—20. *Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.*

WE are told by our blessed Lord, that however great the pains of parturition may be, a woman remembereth no more her anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. Yet if the mother, watching the child from month to month, should see no growth in his bodily stature, nor any improvement in his intellectual faculties, her joy would soon be turned into grief, and she would account the death of the child a greater blessing than its birth. Somewhat similar to these are the feelings of a minister towards those who have been born to God through his ministrations. Like “the angels in heaven, he rejoices over every sinner that is brought to repentance:” but if his subsequent care and labour be attended with no benefit to his converts, he will feel much pain and sorrow on their account: he will “travail, as it were, in birth a second time, till he see Christ completely formed in them.” To see them walking in the truth, is the one object of his desire, and the summit of his joy^a: and it is only when they stand fast in the faith, that he has a real enjoyment of his life^b. How full of complaints was the Apostle Paul, when the people to whom he had ministered did not make their profiting to appear^c. On the contrary, he quite exulted when he heard of their growth in faith and love^d. But in nothing did he shew his anxiety for their welfare more, than in his unwearied intercessions in their behalf.

The prayer which he offered for the Church at Ephesus, evinces clearly,

I. That the Spirit, as a Spirit of wisdom and revelation, may be obtained by all—

What was sought on behalf of all the Christians at Ephesus, may certainly be expected by Christians in every age and place—

1. We need the Spirit as much as they did in the Apostles’ days—

^a 3 John, ver. 4.

^b 1 Thess. iii. 8.

^c 1 Cor. iii. 1—3. Gal. iii. 1. and iv. 11, 19, 20. Heb. v. 12.

^d 2 Thess. i. 3, 4.

[If we are unconverted, our eyes are blind^e, our souls are dead^f, yea we are incapable of receiving or knowing the things of the Spirit, because we have not that spiritual discernment, whereby alone they can be discerned^g — — — If we are converted, still we are in need of fresh supplies of the Spirit, as much as the Ephesian converts were. It is “by the Spirit only that we can know the things which have been freely given to us of God^h.” The Apostles not only had been converted, but had enjoyed the public and private instructions of their Divine Master for nearly four years: yet after his resurrection he “opened their understandings to understand the Scripturesⁱ,” and on the day of Pentecost gave them his Spirit in a more abundant measure, “to guide them into all truth^k.” It is by repeated communications of the same Spirit that we also are to obtain a deeper insight into the things of God. We find oftentimes, even after we have been enlightened, that the written word is only to us as “a dead letter;” and that unless the Spirit shine upon it, we learn no more from it than from a dial when the sun is hid behind a cloud.

If then we need the Spirit as much as they did of old, we may expect it as well as they.]

2. The promises relating to the communications of the Spirit, are made to *us*, as much as to any persons whatever—

[Those of the Old Testament extend to the Church in every age. Shall we confine to the apostolic age such declarations as those; “Turn you at my reproof, and I will pour out my Spirit upon you^l.” “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord^m.” “This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of themⁿ.” “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes^o?” To deny our interest in such passages as these, were to rob us of half the Scriptures.

And what shall we say to the promises of the New Testament? Shall we limit those also to the Apostles’ days? Hear what our Lord says; “If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him^p?” “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and out

^e 2 Cor. iv. 4. ^f Eph. ii. 1. ^g 1 Cor. ii. 14. ^h 1 Cor. ii. 12.

ⁱ Luke xxiv. 45. ^k 1 Cor. ii. 11. with 1 John ii. 20, 27.

^l Prov. i. 23. ^m Isai. liv. 13. with John vi. 45.

ⁿ Jer. xxxi. 33, 34. ^o Ezek. xxxvi. 27. ^p Luke xi. 13.

of his belly shall flow rivers of living water : This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive^q.” “ I will send you another Comforter, who shall *abide with you for ever*^r.” Hear what his Apostles also say : “ Believe on Christ for the remission of your sins ; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost : for the promise is to you, and to your children, and *to as many as are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call*^s.” “ If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his^t.”

Language has neither force nor certainty, if such declarations as these be not to be applied to us.]

3. In the Liturgy of our Church we pray continually for the communications of the Spirit to our souls—

[If we do not intend to mock God in our supplications, we must not only acknowledge our need of the Spirit's influence, but we must really feel it every time that we join in our public services^u— — —]

But, to prevent misapprehension, we shall proceed to state distinctly,

II. What discoveries the Spirit will make to our souls—

This is certain, that *no new revelation is to be expected by us* : the canon of Scripture is closed : and if any man pretend to new revelations, let him confirm his pretensions, by clear and undoubted miracles ; or else let him be rejected as an enthusiast and deceiver. The Spirit now enlightens men only by shining upon the written word, and opening their understandings to understand it. But in this way he will make wonderful discoveries to the soul. He will give us just views,

^q John vii. 37—39.

^r John xiv. 16.

^s Acts ii. 38, 39.

^t Rom. viii. 9.

^u In the Prayer for the King we say, “ Replenish him with the grace of thy Holy Spirit.” In the Litany, “ That it may please thee to illuminate all Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, with true knowledge and understanding of thy word.” [*Mark this well.*] See also the Collects for 1st Sunday after Epiphany—5th Sunday after Easter—Whit-Sunday—9th Sunday after Trinity—19th ditto. Compare these with the text ; and see whether, in the judgment of our reformers, the best and most learned of men do not still need to have the Spirit, as a Spirit of wisdom and revelation, given unto them.

1. Of God himself—

[Somewhat of God may be known from books, without any supernatural aid: but the knowledge gained in that way will be merely theoretical; it will have no suitable influence upon the heart and life. But the very same truths, when applied by the Spirit to the soul, make a deep impression on the mind; they fill it with wonder and with love; and constrain the enraptured soul to exclaim, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee^x!” How precious does Christ appear at such seasons! how “unsearchable the length and breadth and depth and height of his incomprehensible love^y!” These are the manifestations of himself which our blessed Lord promised to his Church^z; and without which we cannot know aright either him or his Father^a.

Let us pray then for “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, in, and for, *the knowledge of him*.”]

2. Of the hope to which he has called us—

[How low are our apprehensions of the Christian's portion, when no particular revelation of it is made to the soul! We can speak of pardon and acceptance, of grace and glory; but we speak of them with no more feeling than if they were mere fictions. But O what a “gloriously rich inheritance” does ours appear, when our eyes are opened by the Spirit to behold it! One Pisgah-view of the promised land, how does it transport the soul to heaven, and make us long to be dissolved, that we may be with Christ! As for the inheritances of princes, they then appear as worthless as the toys that amuse a child. The realities of the eternal world surpass all sublunary things, as the splendour of the sun exceeds the glimmering of a taper. “These things, which no carnal eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived, these things, I say, God *now* reveals to us by his Spirit^b,” yea, he gives us an earnest of them in our hearts^c.]

3. Of the work he has wrought in us—

[We are apt to undervalue the work that is already wrought in us, because so much remains to be done. But when God shines upon his own work, we entertain very different thoughts respecting it. It is no light matter then in our eyes to have been quickened from the dead, and “created anew in Christ Jesus.” It seems no less a work than that which was “wrought for Christ, when God raised him from

^x Job xlii. 5.

^z John xiv. 21—23. and xvi. 14, 15.

^b 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

^y Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^a Matt. xi. 27.

^c Eph. i. 13, 14.

the dead," and "set him at his own right hand, above all the principalities and powers," whether of heaven or hell. We were dead and buried; and Satan set, as it were, the stone, the seal, the watch, to keep us securely under the power of the grave. But our God came "by the mighty working of his power," and made us triumphant over all the powers of darkness, and still "always causeth us to triumph in Christ." Truly the believer, when he views these things, is a wonder to himself: he is a burning bush^d, a captive ruling over his oppressors^e, a worm threshing the mountains^f.]

ADDRESS—

1. Let us seek to *attain the Christian's character*—

[The Ephesians were already Christians: they possessed the two distinctive marks of the Christian character, "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and love unto all the saints." These marks we must possess. It is in vain to hope for the higher manifestations of the Spirit, till we have received those communications which are of prime and indispensable necessity. Till these evidences of true religion appear, neither can ministers have any joy over you, nor you any scriptural hope for yourselves. Come then to Christ as perishing sinners, and cast in your lot with his people, that you may have your portion with them in a better world.]

2. Let us seek to *enjoy the Christian's privileges*—

[We would not that any of you should live below your privileges. "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory," is willing to bestow on you the richest gifts, and to exalt you to the sublimest happiness. He is ready to make all his glory pass before your eyes, and to proclaim in your hearing all his goodness^g. Though he will not catch you up to Paradise, as he did the Apostle Paul, or make the heavens open to you, as he did to the dying Stephen, yet will he shine into your hearts, to give you light and knowledge, of which you have at present scarcely any conception^h. Seek then these sublime attainments, which will at once enhance your present happiness, and increase your meetness for your heavenly inheritance.]

^d Exod. iii. 2.

^f Isai. xli. 15.

^h 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^e Isai. xiv. 2.

^g Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19.

MMXCVI.

CHRIST THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH.

Eph. i. 20—23. *He raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

LITTLE do men imagine what power is necessary to effect the salvation of their souls. They are ready to suppose that they can repent, and turn to God, of themselves, by the force of their own resolutions. But the creation itself was not more the product of a Divine power, than the new creation is in the souls of men. Yea, if we can conceive that any one thing needs a greater exertion of omnipotence than another, it is this. The Apostle strongly expresses this idea in the passage before us. He is praying for the Ephesian converts, that they may have just and adequate notions of the power that has been exercised towards them, in bringing them to their present state. Overwhelmed, as it were, with the thought, he accumulates all the most forcible terms that language could afford him, in order to convey some faint idea of the subject: and then he illustrates the point by the most stupendous effort of omnipotence that ever was exhibited since the foundation of the world; namely, by the raising of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and the investing of him with all power, both in heaven and earth.

In contemplating this work of omnipotence, the exaltation of Christ upon his Father's throne, we shall fix our attention upon two things:

I. His supremacy above all creatures—

The death, the resurrection, and the ascension of our Lord Jesus, we pass over in silence. It is not the *act* of our Saviour's elevation, but the *state* to

which he is elevated, which we propose for your present consideration. This includes,

1. A state of dignity—

[“The right hand of God” is a metaphorical expression for the place of the highest dignity and glory in the heavenly world. There Jesus sits, exalted “far above all” creatures in earth, in hell, or in heaven. The phrase, “principalities and powers,” is applied in Scripture to men^a, to devils^b, and to the holy angels^c. And the Apostle evidently intended to comprehend them all, because he specified yet further “every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.” Now it should seem, that as, on earth, there are different ranks and orders of magistrates, from the king, who is supreme, to those who exercise the most limited jurisdiction, so there is a gradation of beings both in heaven and hell. We read of Michael, the archangel; and of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils; and to them we ascribe a pre-eminence among their fellows. But however exalted any creature may be, Jesus Christ is raised “far above” him. The lustre of the whole universe, in comparison of his, would be only like that of the twinkling stars before the meridian sun; they may have a splendour in his absence; but before him they are constrained to hide their inglorious heads: they are eclipsed, they vanish at his presence. If he but suffer one ray of his majesty to appear, men fall, as dead, at his feet; devils tremble; and “angels worship him” with profoundest adoration.]

2. A state of power—

[While Jesus yet hanged upon the cross, “he spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them openly in it.” From that time “all things were put under his feet;” and more especially from the moment that he was seated on his mediatorial throne. It is true that “we see not yet (as the Apostle says) all things put under him.” But though they are not *visibly*, they are *in fact*. All his enemies are like the five kings of Canaan, when Joshua and all the elders of Israel put their feet upon their necks. They are living indeed; but their power is broken: and they are doomed to a speedy and ignominious death. Devils are more aware of this than men: when they saw Jesus in the days of his flesh, they asked, “Art thou come to torment us before our time?” Still however they combine with men, and stimulate them to oppose his will. But when they are consulting together, saying, “Let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us,”

^a Tit. iii. 1.

^b Eph. vi. 12.

^c Eph. iii. 10.

he “laughs them to scorn, and has them in derision.” He suffers them to accomplish their own will, as far as it may subserve his purposes; and “the remainder of their wrath he restrains.” Full of pride and blasphemy, they boast what great things they will do: but “he puts his hook in their nose, and his bridle in their jaws,” and in a moment brings all their boasted projects to an end^d. Whatever they may effect, they are his instruments, to “do what his hand, and his counsel, had determined before to be done.” In all things “his counsel stands, and he does all his pleasure.”]

By means of this supremacy, he is enabled to carry on,

II. His government of his Church—

In investing his Son with “all power in heaven and in earth,” God had especial respect to the welfare of his Church. He constituted his Son,

1. The Head of the Church—

[The Church is called “his body,” and “his fulness.” The body, we know, consists of many members: and it is the whole aggregate of members that constitutes the body: and the body, joined to the head, forms the complete man. *This is the precise idea in the text.* Every believer is a member of Christ: the whole collective number of believers form his entire body: and, by their union with him, Christ himself is represented as complete. The body would not be complete, if any member were wanting; nor is the Head complete without the body: but the body united to the Head is “the fulness,” *the completion* of Christ himself^e.

The head however exercises a controul over the whole body. As being the residence of the soul, it may be said to actuate all the members: it moves in the limbs, sees in the eyes, hears in the ears, speaks in the tongue, and imparts a vital energy to the whole. Thus does Christ “fill all in all.” There is not a member of his mystical body which does not derive all his strength from him. From him the understanding receives its comprehension; the will, its activity; the affections, their power. It is by him that we live; or rather, as the Apostle speaks, “he is our life.” In all *persons*, there is the same absolute dependence on him: “in all” *circumstances*, his agency is wanted: (it is as much wanted to produce a good thought, as to carry it into execution.) “In all” *ages*, he is equally the true and only source of good to man. None in any place or period of the world have any thing which they

^d Isai. xxxvii. 29. Job v. 12, 13.

^e πλήρωμα.

did not first “receive out of his fulness^f,” so true is it, in the strongest sense of the words, that “he filleth all in all.” Thus is Christ, in his present exalted state, the living, and life-giving Head of all his Church, his Church militant, and his Church triumphant.]

2. The Head over all things for his Church’s good—

[In the management of the universe, Jesus consults the best interests of his Church. If he permit evil to befall his people, it is with a view to their deeper humiliation. If, on the contrary, he fill them with peace and joy, it is for the purpose of quickening them to more holy ardour in his ways. Nothing is further from the intention of their enemies than to do them good: but they are all under his controul; and when they desire nothing so much as to frustrate his purposes, they ignorantly and unwittingly fulfil them^g. As, in his own case, the envy of the priests, the treachery of Judas, the cowardice of Pilate, and the blind fury of the populace, conspired to bring him to that death, which was to fulfil the Scriptures and to redeem the world, and which was of necessity to precede his exaltation to glory; so every creature, whatever be its aim, is executing his gracious purposes with respect to his Church, and is doing that very thing, which every member of the Church, if he could foresee the final issue of events, would actually wish to be done.]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. Our duty towards him—

[Is he the supreme Governor of the universe? then we should obey his voice—and submit to his will—and seek in all things his glory. Is he in a more especial manner our Head? then we should look to him for direction, and depend on him for every thing we may stand in need of.]

2. Our security in him—

[Who shall overcome *him*, when “all things are under his feet?” or, “Who shall pluck us out of his hands,” provided we belong to him? We may, with St. Paul, defy all the principalities and powers both of earth and hell^h. Neither the Church at largeⁱ, nor the smallest member of it^k, has any thing to fear. “If he be for us, none can be successfully against us^l.”]

3. Our happiness through him—

^f John i. 16.

^g Gen. i. 20.

^h Rom. viii. 38, 39.

ⁱ Matt. xvi. 18.

^k Amos ix. 9. Matt. xviii. 14.

^l Rom. viii. 31.

[The principal subject of the Apostle's prayer is, that we may know what mighty power God exercises towards his believing people. The exaltation of Christ is introduced by him quite incidentally, and merely for the purpose of illustrating his main point. But, having introduced the subject, he draws a parallel between the believer's exaltation, and that of Christ. Behold then the Lord Jesus raised from the dead, and seated at his Father's right hand, far above all principalities and powers: such is the honour, and such the happiness, that is imparted to the believing soul^m: and even that which he now enjoys, is but a shadow of what he will enjoy to all eternity. Believer, let your expectations be enlarged: the felicity of the Head is the felicity prepared for the members: "Such honour have all his saints."]

^m Compare ver. 19—22. with ii. 5—7.

MMXCVII.

ORIGINAL SIN STATED, AND IMPROVED.

Eph. ii. 3. *And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*

AMONG the many beautiful traits which mark the character of St. Paul, we cannot but notice particularly his readiness to place himself on a level with the least and lowest of mankind, and to confess his obligations to the sovereign grace of God for all the difference that had been made between him and others. In his Epistle to Titus he gives such a representation of himself and his fellow-Apostles in their unconverted state, as was most humiliating to them, whilst it afforded rich encouragement to all who felt the plague of their own hearts. In like manner, in the epistle before us, after shewing that the Gentile world had been altogether in a state of bondage to sin and Satan, he declares, that he himself, and all others without exception, had in fact been in a condition no less deplorable, both by nature and practice;—by practice having habitually fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and being "by nature children of wrath, even as others."

That we may fully enter into the confession which he here makes, we shall,

I. Explain the terms here used—

We may notice them,

1. Separately—

[As in the preceding verse the words "*children of disobedience*" mean "disobedient children," so, in our text, "*children of wrath*" must be understood as importing "*children doomed to wrath:*" just as a similar expression of St. Peter is actually translated: what in the Greek is "*sons of a curse,*" is in our translation "*cursed children*^a." It is a Hebraism, common throughout all the inspired writings.

Such, we are told, is the state of all "*by nature,*" Those who are adverse to the doctrine of original sin, would interpret these words as importing, that men were in this state "*by habit or custom:*" but the words cannot with any propriety be so construed: the only true and proper sense of them is that which our translators have here assigned to them^b.

The Apostle further says, that he and his fellow-Apostles were in this state, "*even as others.*" The Jews were ready enough to account the Gentiles accursed; but they thought that no curse could attach to them, because they were children of Abraham. This mistake St. Paul rectifies in our text, declaring, that whatever privileges the Jews might enjoy above the Gentiles, there was in this respect no difference between them; the Jews, yea the Apostles themselves, being, by nature, children of wrath, even as others.]

2. Taken in their collective sense—

[According to their plain and obvious and undeniable import, they declare, that every child of man, whatever be his privileges, or whatever his attainments, is by nature under the wrath of God.

All, as fallen in Adam, *deserve God's wrath.* Adam was the covenant-head and representative of all his descendants. Had he stood, they would have stood in him: and, as he fell, they fell in him. If it be thought strange, that his posterity should be responsible for his act, let it suffice to say, that, if he fell, there can be no doubt but that we, if subjected to the same trial, should have fallen also: yea, considering all the circumstances in which he was placed, (created in the fullest possession of all his faculties, having a perfect nature, and subjected only to one single trial, and having dependent on him the welfare, not of himself alone, but of all his posterity,) it was infinitely more probable that he would stand, than that we should, who come into the world in a state of infantine

^a 2 Pet. ii. 14.

^b See Guyse's note on the text.

weakness. But, whether we approve of it or not, so the matter is ; and so it was ordained of God : and, exactly as Levi is said to have paid tithes in Abraham, (though he was not born till one hundred and fifty years after the circumstance of paying tithes occurred,) merely because he was in the loins of Abraham at the time that he paid tithes to Melchizedec, so may we be justly said to have sinned in Adam, because we were in the loins of Adam when he sinned. Hence it is declared by God himself, that, “in Adam all have sinned^c,” and “in Adam all have died^d.”

[Moreover, all, as partakers of Adam's fallen nature, *are fit for the wrath of God*. Adam begat children in his own fallen likeness. Indeed, being corrupt himself, he could transmit nothing but corruption to his descendants ; “for who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” Now in whomsoever iniquity be found, God cannot look upon it without abhorrence : and hence it is said, that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” “neither can corruption inherit incorruption.”

Further, all, both as fallen in Adam, and corrupt in themselves are actually *under a sentence of wrath*, and actually doomed to it. This is indeed an awful truth ; but it is explicitly declared by an inspired Apostle, that, “by one man's disobedience many were made sinners,” yea, that “by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation^e.”]

Having endeavoured to ascertain the precise import of the words, we proceed to,

II. Establish the truth contained in them—

In proof of what our text asserts, we appeal,

1. To Scripture—

[Consult *the declarations of Almighty God*. In the Old Testament he has testified, that every human being, without exception, is corrupt, not in act only, but “in every imagination and thought of his heart^f.” And this testimony which the heart-searching God himself bore before the flood, as a reason for destroying the earth, he renewed after the flood, as a reason why he would deluge the earth no more ; seeing that, if he should proceed to destroy it as soon as it should become universally corrupt, he would have to repeat his judgments continually, there being nothing but iniquity in every child of man^g. In the New Testament we have a similar declaration from our blessed Lord. He, assigning a reason why no

^c Rom. v. 12.

^d 1 Cor. xv. 22.

^e Rom. v. 18, 19.

^f Gen. vi. 5.

^g Gen. viii. 21.

unregenerate man can possibly behold the kingdom of God, says, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh^h," and therefore incapable of enjoying a spiritual kingdom.

With these declarations of God agree *the confessions of his most eminent saints*. To his original corruption David traced the sin which he had committed in the matter of Uriah; not intending thereby to extenuate, but rather to aggravate, its guilt: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin hath my mother conceived meⁱ." St. Paul also, speaking of the conflicts which he yet had to maintain against the corruption that remained within him, says, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing^k:" "I see a law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members^l." Thus we see both these eminent saints confessing that their nature, as derived from their first parents, was altogether corrupt.

To these we may add *the promises which God has made to his fallen creatures*: "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh^m." What can be the meaning of this? What need they a new heart, if the old heart be not corrupt? or why should he promise to take away the stony heart, if the heart be not by nature hard and obdurate?

Not to multiply passages, which yet might be multiplied to a great extent, we will further appeal,]

2. To experience—

[Let any one make his observations on what passes all around him, or trace the records of his own heart, and say, whether children, as born into the world, be not partakers both of *Adam's corruption*, and *Adam's punishment*.

Is not every child full of evil tempers and dispositions? There is, it is true, more evil in some than in others: but who ever saw "a child in whose heart folly and iniquity were not bound up?" If a child be even tolerably free from fretfulness, and impatience, and selfishness, and falsehood, is it not admired as a prodigy? And when children grow up to the exercise of reason, do they improve that reason in seeking after God? Do they not invariably shew that their dispositions are altogether earthly, and that by nature they affect only the things of time and sense? Nor is this the case with children of one age or one nation only, but of every age, and every nation, yea, of the most godly parents too, as well as of the ungodly.

^h John iii. 6.

ⁱ Ps. li. 5.

^k Rom. vii. 18.

^l Rom. vii. 23.

^m Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

And, as they inherit the corruption of Adam, so do they also his guilt and punishment. Death, we know, was the penalty of Adam's transgression; "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." But children who have never sinned in their own persons, are subjected to death: we see little new-born infants oppressed with sickness, and racked with pain, and cut off by an untimely stroke of death. For whose sin are they thus punished? Their own? They are not capable of actual sin. It is for Adam's sin therefore that they are punishedⁿ: and that indisputably proves, that they are, as they are represented in our text, "children of wrath."

We do not say that children, dying before they have committed actual sin, are consigned over to everlasting death: we hope, and believe, that God does, for Christ's sake, extend his mercy to them: but this alters not the case at all: we consider only what they are in themselves, and what they deserve at God's hands, and to what, as fallen creatures, they are doomed by God's righteous law: the relief which may be afforded them by the Gospel is not the present subject of our consideration: our present position which we are to establish, and which we think we have fully established, is, that all, as born into the world, are "children of wrath."]

We will now endeavour to,

III. Suggest a suitable improvement of the subject—

Surely we may see from hence—

1. In what a deplorable condition are all they who are yet in a state of nature—

[Children of wrath were they born, and children of wrath have they continued to the present hour. We know indeed how strenuously it is asserted by many, that baptism and regeneration are the same thing, and that to look for a new nature in conversion is unnecessary. But we would ask every parent here present, have you *invariably* found that your children, from the moment that they were baptized, put away their evil dispositions, and instantly became new creatures? Is it even *generally* found, that this change takes place at baptism? I might almost proceed to ask, did you ever see this change so wrought by baptism, that you could not do otherwise than refer it to baptism as the means which God made use of for that end? We do not presume to say, that God never does confer a new heart in baptism; but we say, that if that be the usual, and still more the constant, means of regeneration to the children of men, it is very extraordinary that the change wrought is so rarely visible, that, if it were undeniably

ⁿ Rom. v. 12, 14.

to appear, it would be universally esteemed a miracle. The truth is, that they who are so strenuous for this opinion, have invariably but very low notions of original sin. It is their low sense of their disease that leads them to rest in such a remedy. But, as "the fault and corruption of their nature is such as deserves God's wrath and damnation^o," they must have a new nature given to them by the operation of the Holy Ghost: they must be renewed, not externally, or partially, but inwardly, and in all the powers of their souls: they must "be renewed *in the spirit of their minds*," their whole dispositions being changed from earthly and carnal to spiritual and heavenly: in a word, they must be created anew in Christ Jesus^a, and become altogether "new creatures, old things passing away, and all things becoming new^r." The change may not unfitly be compared with a river where the tide comes: one while it flows with great rapidity from the fountain-head to the ocean: a few hours afterwards it flows with equal rapidity back again towards the fountain-head: and this change is wrought by the invisible, yet undisputed, influence of the moon. In like manner does the soul of every truly regenerate man flow back towards God, from whom but lately, with all its faculties and powers, it receded: and this change is effected by the invisible, but real and undoubted, operation of the Spirit of God: and till this change is effected, we remain under the wrath of Almighty God. O consider the wrath of God: how terrible the thought! To all eternity it will be "the wrath *to come*." May God stir us all up to flee from it, and, in newness of heart and life, to "lay hold on eternal life!"]

2. In what a happy condition are they who have been brought from a state of nature to a state of grace—

[Such, whilst they humbly acknowledge that they "*were* children of wrath," may with adoring gratitude assure themselves, that they are so no longer. But let them never forget what they were, or what obligations they owe to that grace of God which has delivered them. Hear how strongly St. Paul inculcates this on those to whom our text was addressed: "We were by nature children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, of his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ" . . . "Wherefore remember," (O beloved brethren, REMEMBER,) "that at that time ye were without Christ, (O, think of that!) being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus

^o See the Ninth Article of our Church.

^p Eph. iv. 23.

^a ver. 10.

^r 2 Cor. v. 17.

ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ^s." Dear brethren, *remember* this transition; and let every syllable that records it fill your souls with gratitude to your almighty Saviour and Deliverer.]

3. What attention should be shewn to the welfare of the rising generation—

[They are "all by nature children of wrath." And should they be left in that awful state? Should no means be used to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God?

O parents, look at your dear offspring; and whilst fondling them in your arms, or delighting in their progress, remember what they are, and cry mightily to God for them night and day. Be not contented with their advancement in bodily strength, or intellectual power, or temporal condition; but seek above all things to behold them turning to God, and growing in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let all your plans for them have respect to this one point, the changing of them from children of wrath to children of the living God.

Let those also who have the care of children^t endeavour to get their own minds impressed with the thought, that their office is not so much to convey instruction in worldly knowledge, as to lead the souls of the children to Christ, that they may be partakers of his salvation: and let them engage in their work with hearts full of tender compassion to their scholars, and of zeal for God.

And, my dear children, let me address also a few words to you. Think me not unkind if I remind you of what you are by nature. If I speak to you as children of wrath, it is not to wound your feelings, but to stir you up to improve the opportunities that are afforded you for attaining a better and a happier state. What would you do, my dear children, if you were shut up in a house that was on fire, and a number of benevolent persons were exerting themselves to rescue you from the devouring element? would you not strive which should first be partakers of the benefit? Know then, that this is a just representation of your state: you are children of wrath, and are in danger of dwelling with everlasting burnings: and the object of your instructors is, to shew you how you may flee from the wrath to come. O listen to their instructions with all possible care; treasure up in your minds all their exhortations and advice; and beg of God, that through those Scriptures which they explain to you, you may be made wise unto salvation by faith in Christ Jesus.]

^s ver. 4, 5, 11—13.

^t If this be the subject of a Sermon for *Sunday Schools* or *Charity Schools*, the Instructors in particular may be here addressed.

MMXCVIII.

THE RICHES OF DIVINE GRACE DISPLAYED.

Eph. ii. 4—7. *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*

WHAT an accumulation of sublime ideas is here presented to our view! Well might the Psalmist say that the meditation of God was sweet to him. We scarcely know whether to admire more the grace of the Benefactor, or the felicity of those who participate his blessings. But the text requires us to fix our attention on that most delightful of all subjects, the riches of divine grace. The Apostle has in the preceding verses described the state of the unregenerate world. He now displays the grace of God towards the regenerate,

I. In its source—

God is “rich in mercy,” and “abundant in love”—

[Mercy and love are, as it were, the favourite attributes of the Deity^a: and the exercise of these perfections is peculiarly grateful to him^b. There is an inexhaustible fountain of them in the heart of God^c: they have flowed down upon the most unworthy of the human race; and will flow undiminished to all eternity. While he retains his nature, he cannot but exercise these perfections^d.]

These are the true sources of all the grace displayed towards fallen man—

[Man had nothing in him whereby he could merit the attention of his Maker. He was fallen into the lowest state of guilt and misery: but the bowels of his Creator yearned over him^e. God felt (if we may so speak) an irresistible

^a Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

^b Mic. vii. 18.

^c Rom. x. 12.

^d 1 John iv. 8.

^e In this view, God's solicitude to find Adam, and his affectionate (perhaps plaintive) inquiry after him, Gen. iii. 9. are very striking.

impulse of compassion towards him^f. Hence was it that the Son of God was sent into the world^g: hence also were so many offers of mercy made to man; and to this alone is it owing that so much as one has ever found acceptance with God.]

But, to judge how great the love was wherewith he loved us, we must trace it,

II. In its operations—

The grace of God has been displayed towards us in ten thousand ways; but we must confine our attention to its operations, as they are set forth in the text.

God has “quicken^ded us even when we were dead in sins”—

[What is meant by “dead in sins,” appears from the preceding verses. We were walking according to the course of this world; we were the willing servants of Satan; we were indulging all kinds of “filthiness, both of flesh and spirit;” we were demonstrating ourselves to be “by nature” as well as practice, “children of wrath;” and we were utterly destitute of all power to help and save ourselves^h. Yet *even then* did God look upon us in tender compassionⁱ: he quickened us by the same Spirit whereby he raised Christ from the dead^k. In so doing, he united us “together with Christ,” and rendered us conformable to him as our Head. What an astonishing instance of divine grace was this!]

He has also “raised us up, and enthroned us together with Christ in heaven”—

[The Apostle had before expatiated on what God had wrought for Christ^l: *he now draws a parallel between believers and Christ*. What was done for Christ our head and representative, may be considered as done for all the members of his mystical body. In this view Christians may be considered *figuratively* as risen with Christ, and as already seated on his throne: their hearts, their conversation, their *rest*, is in heaven^m. How has he thus verified the declaration of

^f We may conceive of God as expressing himself in the language of the prophet. Hos. xi. 8, 9.

^g John iii. 16.

^h Rom. v. 6.

ⁱ This may be illustrated by Ezek. xvi. 4—6.

^k Compare 1 Pet. iii. 18. with Rom. viii. 11.

^l Eph. i. 19, 20. “*quicken^ded, raised, enthroned.*”

^m Col. iii. 1, 2. Phil. iii. 20.

Hannahⁿ! — How has he thus discovered “the exceeding riches of his grace!”]

How worthy of God such a stupendous display of grace is, we shall see if we consider it,

III. In its end—

God is not only the author, but also the end of all things^o; nor would it become him to do any thing but with a view to his own glory. The manifestation of his own glory was the express end for which he revealed his grace^p, and this end is already in some measure attained—

[All ages, to the end of time, must admire the grace of God towards both the Jewish and the Gentile world. Every one, who partakes of that grace, must of necessity admire it: the “exceeding riches of it” are unsearchable. God’s “kindness” too is infinitely enhanced by flowing to us “through Christ Jesus.” The price paid by Christ will to eternity endear to us the blessings purchased: at present, however, the design of God in revealing his grace is not fully answered.]

But it will be completely answered in the day of judgment—

[*Then*, how exceeding rich and glorious will this grace appear! Then the depth of misery, into which we were fallen, will be more fully known; the spring and source of that grace will be more clearly discovered; and all the operations will be seen in one view. Then Christ, the one channel in which it flows, will be more intimately revealed to us. How will every eye then admire, and every tongue then adore! Surely nothing but such an end could account for such operations of the Divine grace; let every one therefore seek to experience these operations in his own soul. Let those who have been favoured with them glorify God with their whole hearts.]

ⁿ 1 Sam. ii. 8.

^o Rom. xi. 36.

^p Eph. i. 6.

MMXCIX.

SALVATION BY GRACE NOT HOSTILE TO GOOD WORKS.

Eph. ii. 8—10. *By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

ALL God's works, of whatever kind they be, are designed to praise him. His works of creation proclaim his wisdom and his power: his works of providence display his goodness: his works of redemption magnify his grace. It is of these last that the Apostle is speaking in the preceding context, even of all that God has done for us in the Son of his love; and he declares that it was all done, "that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus." The Gospel is too rarely viewed in this light: it is by many scarcely distinguished from the law; being considered rather as a code of laws enforced with penalties, than as an exhibition of mercies confirmed with promises. But it is as an exhibition of mercy only that we ought to view it; precisely as it is set forth in the words before us: from which we shall take occasion to shew,

I. That salvation is altogether of grace—

By "salvation" I understand the whole work of grace, whether as revealed in the word, or as experienced in the soul: and it is altogether of grace:

1. It is so—

[Trace it to its first origin, when the plan of it was fixed in the council of peace between the Father and the Son^a: Who devised it? who merited it? who desired it? It was the fruit of God's sovereign grace, and of grace alone. Trace it in all its parts;—the gift of God's only-begotten Son to be our surety and our substitute; the acceptance of his vicarious sacrifice in our behalf; and the revelation of that mystery in

^a Zech. vi. 13.

the written word: who will arrogate to himself the honour of having acquired these, or of having contributed to the acquisition of them in the smallest degree?

It may be thought perhaps, that, because an interest in these things is obtained by faith, we may claim some honour on account of the faith which apprehends them; which, being exercised by us, may be considered in some respects as giving us a ground of glorying before God. But this also is the gift of God, no less than the plan of salvation itself: it is not in any man by nature; nor is it to be wrought in man by any human power: it is not the effect of reasoning: for then the acutest reasoners would be the strongest believers; which is frequently far from being the case: it is solely the gift of God: and hence they who have believed, are said to “have believed through grace^b.” It is expressly said to be given us^c: and when Peter declared his faith in Jesus as the true Messiah, Jesus said to him, “Flesh and blood had not revealed this truth unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” This is the true reason why many believed the testimony of Christ and his Apostles, whilst others were hardened in unbelief: those “whose hearts God opened,” as he did Lydia’s, received the truth; whilst all others treated the word, either with open scorn, or secret indifference.]

2. It must be so—

[Salvation must either be of grace or of works: the two cannot be mixed together, or reconciled with each other: if it be of works in any degree, it is no more of grace^d; and in whatever degree it is of works, it so far affords us an occasion of boasting; seeing that it is then a debt paid, and not a gift bestowed^e.

To avoid this conclusion, some will say, that salvation may be of works, and still be also of grace; because the works being wrought in us by God, he is entitled to all the glory of them. But, granting that they are wrought in us by God, yet, inasmuch as they are *our* works, they afford us a ground of glorying: and, to say that they do not afford us a ground of glorying, is directly to contradict the Apostle in our text, where he says, “It is not of works, lest any man should boast.” The same Apostle elsewhere says, “It is of faith, that it may be by grace^f:” from both which passages it is evident, that, if it be of works, from whatever source those works proceed, it can no longer be by grace.

But here it may be asked, ‘If works, notwithstanding they are wrought in us by God, afford us a ground of glorying in

^b Acts xviii. 27.

^c Phil. i. 29.

^d Rom. xi. 6.

^e Rom. iv. 4.

^f Rom. iv. 16.

ourselves, does not faith afford us the same ground of glorying?' I answer, No: for it is of the very nature of faith to renounce all hope in ourselves, and to found our hopes solely on the merits of another: it disclaims all glorying in self, and gives all the glory to Him from whom it derives its blessings. In this it differs essentially from every other work: other works, though wrought in us by God, bring a glory to ourselves; but this, of necessity, transfers to God all the glory resulting from its exercise; and, consequently, neither does, nor can, nor desires to, arrogate any thing to itself.

Thus we hope that the point is clear,—salvation is altogether of grace from first to last. The plan of salvation as originally devised, the Saviour who wrought it out for us, the acceptance of his vicarious sacrifice in our behalf, and the faith whereby we are made partakers of his sacrifice, are all the gifts of free and sovereign grace: the foundation and the superstructure are wholly of grace: and, “when the headstone shall be brought forth, it must be with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it^g!”]

If to this it be objected, that by such doctrines we subvert the very foundations of morality, we answer,

II. That, though good works are wholly excluded from all share in the office of justifying the soul, yet is the performance of them effectually secured—

Believers are “the workmanship of God” altogether, as much as the world itself is: and as the world was created by Christ Jesus, so are they “created anew in Christ Jesus.” But we are “created *unto good works*, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.”

The concluding words of our text shew us,

1. That God has ordained good works as the path wherein we are to walk—

[This is an unquestionable truth: the whole of the moral law demonstrates it: every promise, every threatening in the whole Bible attests it. Not a word can be found in the whole sacred volume, that dispenses with the performance of good works: on the contrary, it is expressly said, that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” The least idea of reaching heaven in any other path, is invariably reprobated as a

most fatal delusion. The means and the end are indissolubly connected in the councils of heaven^h: and to hope that they shall ever be separated, is to deceive and ruin our own souls. If we are not careful to maintain good works, we entirely counteract all the purposes of God in his Gospel, and cut ourselves off from all hope of salvationⁱ.]

2. That God has prepared and fitted his people to walk in them^k—

[He has given to his people a new nature, and infused into their souls a new and heavenly principle, by which they “have passed from death unto life.” They have received from Christ “that living water, which is in them as a well of water springing up unto everlasting life^l.” They can no more sin in the way they did before^m. Under the influence of the Holy Ghost, they move in a new direction, affecting the things of the Spirit, as formerly they affected the things of the fleshⁿ. They are *created* in Christ Jesus *unto* good works; and the impulse given them in this new creation they obey. The metaphor here used, may, if not pressed too far, illustrate the matter, and set it in a clear point of view. God, when he created the heavenly bodies, appointed them their respective paths in the regions of space. To each he gave its proper impulse, having previously fitted it for the performance of the revolutions assigned it: and in their respective orbits he has ever since upheld them, so that they all without exception fulfil the ends for which they were created. Thus in the new creation, God has appointed to all their destined course through the vast expanse of moral and religious duty. He has also, at the time of its new creation, given to each soul the impulse necessary for it, together with all the qualities and dispositions proper for the regulation of its motions according to his will: and he yet further, by his continual, though invisible, agency, preserves them in their appointed way^o. But further than this the metaphor must not be pressed: for the heavenly bodies have neither consciousness nor volition; but we have both: they too carry with them nothing that can cause an aberration from their destined course; whereas we have innumerable impediments, both within and without:

^h 2 Thess. ii. 13.

ⁱ Tit. ii. 4—8. Mark the eighth verse especially.

^k This perhaps is, of the two, the more exact sense of the original.

^l John iv. 14.

^m 1 John iii. 9.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 1—5. and Gal. v. 17.

^o Men fit themselves for perdition: but it is God alone who fits any for glory. See Rom. ix. 23. where the same word is used as in the text. See also Isai. xxvi. 12.

hence they fulfil their destinies without the smallest intermission; whilst we, alas! deviate from the path assigned us in instances without number. Still however, in the event, the purposes of God are at last accomplished, as with them, so with us also: and, notwithstanding, in the estimation of a self-righteous Pharisee, the chief reason for performing good works is taken away, yet are they performed, and shall be performed by every one that has “received the grace of God in truth.”]

OBSERVE then from hence,

1. What need we have of humility—

[The pride of the human heart can never endure the doctrines of grace. So tenacious are men of every thing that may give them a ground of glorying in themselves, that they will rather perish in their own righteousness, than submit to be saved by the righteousness of another^p? But, brethren, you must submit. God will not condescend to your terms. It is in vain to contest the matter with him: it is folly, it is madness, so to do. You know full well, that the fallen angels have no claim on God for mercy: and what have you more than they? But God, who has passed by the angels, has given a Saviour to you, yea, and salvation too, if you will receive it as a gift of grace. Let it not be a hard matter with you to accept the proffered benefit. Would the fallen angels, think you, refuse it, if a tender of it were made to them? O then, prostrate yourselves before your God, as deserving nothing but wrath; and let him glorify in you the unsearchable riches of his grace!]

2. The vast importance of faith—

[It is by faith alone that you can apprehend the Saviour, or be made partakers of his benefits. You must “be saved by grace, *through faith*.” Your whole life must be a life of faith, according to what St. Paul has said, “The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” But this faith you must receive from above. You can neither come to Christ, nor know Christ, except as you are taught and drawn by the Father^q. Pray to him, saying, “Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.” Pray also to him to “increase your faith” yet more and more: for it is only by being strong in faith that you will approve yourselves to God, or abound, as you ought, in all the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory.]

3. What obligations lie upon you to serve and glorify your God—

^p Rom. ix. 30—33. and x. 3.

^q Matt. xi. 27. John vi. 65.

[Be it so ; you are not to be saved by good works : but is there no other motive that you can find for the performance of them ? Do you feel no obligation to Him who sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that you might live through him ? When you know that God has “ordained that you should walk in the daily exercise of good works,” have you no desire to please him ? And when you know that this is the only path in which it is possible for you ever to arrive at your Father’s house, will you wilfully turn aside from it ? If gratitude will not constrain you, will you be insensible to fear ? But further, it is by your works that men will judge of your principles : and, though they represent the doctrines of grace as leading to licentiousness, they will expect to see you more holy than others ; and if they are disappointed in this, they will cast the blame upon your principles, and upon the Gospel itself. Will you then put a stumbling-block in the way of others, and cause “the name of your God and Saviour to be blasphemed ?” No ; “you have not so learned Christ, if so be ye have heard him and been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus.” See then that ye abound in every good word and work ; and “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well-doing.”]

MMC.

THE STATES OF THE REGENERATE AND THE UNREGENERATE CONTRASTED.

Eph. ii. 12, 13. *Ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world : but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*

THERE is scarcely any thing which has a greater tendency to impress our minds with exalted views of the grace of God, than to compare the guilt and misery of an unconverted state, with the purity and happiness into which we are brought by the Gospel of Christ. As a shipwrecked person, viewing the tempest from a rock on which he has been cast, feels a solemn and grateful sense of the mercy vouchsafed unto him ; so surely must every one, who “looks unto the rock whence he has been hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence he has been digged,” stand

amazed at the Divine goodness, and be quickened to pour out his soul in grateful adorations. To produce this frame, is the scope of the whole preceding part of this epistle, wherein the Apostle extols and magnifies the grace of God, as manifested to his redeemed people. Having shewn what their state had been previous to conversion, and contrasted it with that to which they are introduced by the Gospel, he exhorts them to bear it in remembrance: “Wherefore *remember*,” remember what ye *were*, that ye may be thankful for what ye *are*^a.

We propose to shew,

I. The state of unregenerate men—

The state of the Jews and Gentiles represented in a very lively manner the conditions of persons under the Gospel: the external privileges of the Jews, typifying the internal and spiritual privileges of the regenerate; and the abhorred state of the Gentiles marking with equal clearness the ignorance and misery of the unregenerate. In this view, what the Apostle says of the Ephesians, previous to their conversion to Christianity, may be considered as applicable to all at this day, who are not truly and savingly converted:

1 They are “without Christ”—

[The Gentiles, of course, had no knowledge of, nor any interest in, the Lord Jesus Christ. And thus it is with the unregenerate amongst ourselves: they are without Christ^b; they are separated from him as branches cut off from the vine: they do not depend upon him, or receive sap and nutriment from him. They indeed call themselves Christians; but they have no union with Christ, nor any communications from him.]

2. They are “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel”—

[Israel are called a commonwealth, because they were governed by laws different from all other people, and possessed privileges unknown to the rest of the world. Thus the true Israel at this day may be considered in the same light; because

^a ver. 11. with the text. ^b χωρὶς Χριστοῦ. Comp. John xv. 5.

they, and they only, acknowledge Christ as their governor: they alone yield obedience to *his* laws, and they alone enjoy the privileges of his people. Now as the Gentiles were “aliens” from the commonwealth of the Jews, so are all unconverted men “aliens” from the commonwealth of the converted. They are governed by different laws; following the customs, fashions, and erroneous maxims of the world: they are separated from them in heart and affection; and though, from necessity, they must sometimes have intercourse with the godly, they never unite with them as one people, or desire to have one lot together with them.]

3. They are “strangers from the covenants of promise”—

[There is, strictly speaking, but *one* covenant of grace: but the Apostle speaks of it in the plural number; because it was given at different times, and always with increasing fulness and perspicuity. Whether given to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, or to Moses, it was always the same: only the promises annexed to it were more copious and explicit. It is called “the covenant of promise,” to distinguish it from the covenant of works, which consisted only in requirements; whereas this consists chiefly in promises: under the covenant of works, men were to *do* all; under the covenant of grace they were to *receive* all.

It is obvious that the Gentiles were “strangers” to this covenant: and though it is not alike obvious, it is equally true, that the unconverted are strangers to it also. We confess they are admitted into the external bond of it in their baptism: but they do not become partakers of the promised blessings till they sue for them in the exercise of faith and prayer. And we will venture to appeal to the generality of baptized persons, Whether they are not as much strangers to the covenant of promise, as if no such covenant existed? Do they rest upon the promises? Do they treasure them up in their minds? Do they plead them in prayer before God? Do they found all their hopes of happiness upon them? Alas! they have little acquaintance with the nature of the covenant, and no submission to its terms: and consequently they are utter strangers to the covenant, and to the promises contained in it.]

4. They are without hope—

[The Gentile world are always represented as in a hopeless state; and though we presume not to say, that God will not extend uncovenanted mercy to any, yet we have no warrant to *affirm* that he will. If indeed they *perfectly* fulfilled the law written in their hearts, there is reason to think God would

have mercy on them^c: but who amongst them does *perfectly* fulfil that law? But, waving this, there is an absolute certainty that the state of unconverted men under the Gospel is hopeless: no mercy can possibly be extended to them, if they continue unconverted: they must inevitably and eternally perish. For, how should they have any hope, when they are “without Christ” (who is the Head of all vital influence), and “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel” (to which alone any saving blessings are communicated), and “strangers from the covenant of promise” (which is the only channel by which those blessings are conveyed to us)? From whence then can they derive any hope? or what foundation can they have for it?]

5. They are “without God in the world”—

[The gods of the heathen were no gods: therefore they to whom the God of Israel was unknown, were “without God in the world.” And thus it is with the unconverted amongst ourselves: for though they acknowledge the being of a God, they know not what a just and holy God he is; nor do they glorify him as God, by a conformity to his revealed will. They love not to hear of him: they endeavour to blot out the remembrance of him from their minds; their whole conduct accords with that of Pharaoh, when he said, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go^d.” In a word, the language of their hearts is like that of the fool whom David speaks of, “No God;” there is no God to controul or punish me; or, if there be, I wish there were none^e.]

But that all do not continue in that deplorable condition, will appear by considering,

II. The state to which they are introduced by the Gospel—

Every living man once was in the state above described; but in conversion, men “who were sometimes afar off, are made nigh to God”—

[In what the nearness of converted men to God consists, will appear by the very same considerations as have already been used to illustrate their distance from him in their unconverted state. The Gentiles had no liberty of access to God among the Jews: they had an outer court assigned them: and it would have been at the peril of their lives, if they had presumed to enter the place appropriated to the Jews. But on

^c Rom. ii. 26, 27.

^d Exod. v. 2.

^e Ps. xiv. 1.

conversion to Judaism, they were admitted to a participation of all the rights and privileges of the Jews themselves. Thus persons truly converted to God have liberty to approach the Majesty of heaven; yea, since the vail of the temple was rent in twain, a new and living way is opened for them into the holiest of all: they may go even to the throne of God, and draw nigh to him as their reconciled God and Father. As soon as ever they are "in Christ Jesus," united to him by faith, and interested in his merits, they have every privilege which the most eminent saints enjoy: their sins are pardoned; they have peace with God; and, though they may not be so full of joy as others, yet they have the same grounds of joy, inasmuch as "their Beloved is theirs, and they are his."]

To this happy state they are brought "by the blood of Christ"—

[It was the blood of the sacrifice that availed for the restoration of sinners to the Divine favour under the law: and in the same manner it is the blood of Christ, and that only, that can avail for us. But as in the former case, so also in this, two things are necessary: the blood must be *shed* as an atonement for sin; and it must be *sprinkled* on the offender himself, to intimate his entire affiance in it. Now the shedding of Christ's blood was effected on Calvary, many hundred years ago: and that one offering is sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world. Nothing more therefore is wanting to reconcile us to the Deity. But the sprinkling of his blood upon our hearts and consciences must be done by every one for himself: we must, as it were, dip the hyssop in the blood, and apply it to our own souls: or, in other words, we must exercise faith on the atonement of Christ as the only ground of our acceptance before God. In this way, and in this only, are we ever brought to a state of favour with God, and of fellowship with his people.]

This subject being mentioned as that which was deserving of continual remembrance, we would call upon you to "REMEMBER" it—

1. As a criterion whereby to judge of your state—

[It is evident, that, if once we were afar off from God, and now we are nigh to him, there must have been a transition from the one state to the other, or, as the Scripture expresses it, a "passing from death unto life." Has this transition then ever taken place in your souls? It is not necessary that you should be able to trace the precise time when it began, and the various steps by which it was accomplished: but there is an impossibility for it to have taken place, without your having sought it

humbly, and laboured for it diligently. Have you then *this* evidence at least that it has been accomplished? If not, you can have no reason to think that you have ever yet experienced the change, which characterizes all who are made heirs of salvation.]

2. As a ground of humiliation—

[If you were the most eminent saint that ever lived, it would be well to bear in mind what you once were, and what you would still have been, if Divine grace had not wrought a change within you. Look then at those who “are afar off;” and, when you see their alienation from God, their enmity against his people, their distance from even a hope of salvation, behold your own image, and be confounded on account of your past abominations: yea, “walk softly also before God all the days of your life,” in the recollection, that, as that once was your state, so it would be again, if the grace that originally interposed to change you, do not continually maintain that change in your souls.]

3. As a source of gratitude and joy—

[It is scarcely needful to say, that they who have experienced a restoration to God’s favour, should bless and magnify their Benefactor and Redeemer. But have not those also, who are at the greatest distance from God, reason to rejoice and sing? Yes surely; for they may look at those who are now in heaven, and say, “The blood which availed to bring them nigh to God will also avail for me.” O joyful thought! Ponder it in your hearts, ye careless sinners: consider what the Lord Jesus Christ is both able and willing to do for *you*. Every saint, whether on earth or in heaven, was once in your state; and if you will seek remission through the blood of Christ, you shall be partakers of their privileges, both in this world and in the world to come.]

MMCI.

ACCESS TO GOD BY THE PRIESTHOOD.

Eph. ii. 18. *Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.*

AS there is no question more important, so there is none more beyond the reach of unassisted reason, than that which Balak put to Balaam, “Wherewith shall I come before the Most High God?” Many are the expedients which have been devised for

obtaining acceptance with God: but there has been only one true way from the beginning, namely, through the sacrifice of Christ. This has been gradually revealed to man with increasing clearness; but was never fully manifested till the days of the Apostles. The sacrifices of the Mosaic law threw considerable light upon this interesting subject: yet, while they revealed, they tended also to obscure, it: for the Gentiles were forbidden to enter into the sanctuary; and had a court assigned them, called the court of the Gentiles^a. If they became proselytes to the Jewish religion, they were, together with the Jews, received into the sanctuary, or outer court of the temple. The priests and Levites were admitted into the inner court; and the high-priest into the holy of holies; but *that* only on one day in the year. Now the Apostle tells us, that by these distinctions “the Holy Ghost signified, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest.” But in due time Christ himself appeared; and by his death, both fulfilled and abrogated the ceremonial law: since which period the difference between Jew and Gentile has no longer subsisted; the partition wall was thrown down; and the vail of the temple was rent in twain, in token that all, whether Jews or Gentiles, were henceforth to have an equal access to God through Christ.

It is our present intention to shew,

I. The way of access to the Father—

The text contains a brief summary of all that God has revealed upon this subject: it informs us that the way to the Father is,

1. Through the Son—

[The high-priest under the law was the mediator through whom the people drew nigh to God: and by his typical mediation we see how *we* are to approach our God. He entered into the holy place with the blood of the sacrifices, and afterwards burnt incense before the mercy-seat; representing, by the former, *the sacrifice of Christ*; and, by the latter, *his* prevailing

^a Ezek. xlii. 20.

intercession. Without the blood of Christ offered in sacrifice for us, no man could ever have found acceptance with God. Nor would that have availed, if he had not also gone within the vail to be “our advocate with the Father, as well as the propitiation for our sins.” Even if we had been pardoned in consideration of his death, our reconciliation with God would not have continued long: we should soon have renewed our transgressions, and have provoked God utterly to destroy us. But, by this twofold mediation of Christ, Divine justice is satisfied for the offences we have already committed, and the peace that has been effected is maintained inviolate. Now our Lord himself declares that there is no other way to the Father but this^b: and St. Paul assures us, that, in this way, we may all draw nigh to God with boldness and confidence^c.]

2. By the Spirit—

[We know not how to pray to God aright, unless the Holy Spirit help our infirmities and teach us^d. We have no will to approach him, unless the Holy Spirit incline our hearts^e. Even in the regenerate there still remains so strong a disinclination to prayer, that unless God draw them by the influences of his Spirit, they find an almost insuperable reluctance to that duty. Moreover, we have no power to exercise spiritual affections at a throne of grace, unless the Spirit, as “a Spirit of grace and of supplication,” give us a broken and a contrite heart^f. Without his aid, we are only like a ship, whose sails are spread in vain, unless there be a wind to fill them. Even Paul, it should seem, had never prayed aright till his conversion; and then it was said, “Behold he prayeth.” Lastly, without the Spirit, we have no confidence to address the Majesty of heaven. We are deterred by a sense of guilt; and are ready to think that it would be presumption in us to ask any thing at his hands. The Holy Ghost must be in us as “a Spirit of adoption, before we can cry, Abba, Father^g.” Yea, to such a degree are the mouths of God’s dearest children sometimes shut by a sense of guilt, that the Holy Spirit himself maketh intercession in them no other way than by sighs and groans^h. Thus, as there is a necessity for the mediation of Christ to remove our guilt, so is there also of the Spirit’s influence on account of our weakness; since, without his assistance, we have no *knowledge* of our wants, no *will* to seek a supply of them, no *power* to spread them before God, nor any *confidence* to plead with importunity and faith.]

The path being thus clearly marked, let us consider,

^b John xiv. 6.

^c Heb. x. 19—22.

^d Rom. viii. 26.

^e Cant. i. 4.

^f Zech. xii. 10.

^g Rom. viii. 15.

^h Rom. viii. 26, latter part.

II. The excellency of this way—

Waving many things whereby this topic might be illustrated, we shall content ourselves with observing, that this way of access to God,

1. Gives us a wonderful discovery of God himself—

[What an astonishing view does this give us of the Divine *nature*! Here we see manifestly the existence of three persons in the Godhead. Here we see the Father, *to* whom we are to draw nigh, together with the Son, *through* whom, and the Spirit, *by* whom, we are to approach him. These are evidently distinct, though subsisting in one undivided essence. Moreover the offices of the Three Persons in the Trinity are so appropriate, that we cannot speak of them otherwise than they are here declared: we cannot say, that through the Spirit, and by the Father, we have access to Christ; or that through the Father, and by Christ, we have access to the Spirit: this would be to confound what the Scripture keeps perfectly distinct. The Father is the Original Fountain of the Deity: Christ is the Mediator, through whom we approach him: and the Spirit is the Agent, by whom we are enabled to approach him. That each of these divine Persons is God, is as plainly revealed, as that there is a God: and yet we are sure that there is but *one* God. It is not for us to unravel this mystery; but with humility and gratitude to adore that God, who has so mysteriously revealed his nature to us.

While we are led thus to view God as he exists in himself, we cannot but contemplate also his *goodness* to us. What greater mark of it can be conceived, than that the sacred Three should so interest themselves in our salvation? That the Father should devise such a way for our acceptance with him; that the Son should open the way by his meritorious death, and his prevailing intercession; and that the Holy Spirit should condescend to guide us into it, and to keep us in it, even to the end! That these offices should be sustained and executed for the salvation of such insignificant and worthless, yea, such guilty and rebellious creatures, may well excite our wonder, and furnish us with matter of endless praise and thanksgiving.]

2. Is calculated to produce the most salutary effects on the minds of men—

[What consideration can be more *awakening* than that which necessarily arises from the subject before us? Was such a dispensation necessary in order to our restoration to the Divine favour? Must the Father send his only Son to die for

us? Must the Son atone and intercede for us? Must the Holy Ghost descend and dwell in our hearts? Can none of us be saved in any other way than this? How deep then must have been our fall; how desperate our condition! And how inconceivably dreadful must our state be, if we neglect so great salvation!

On the other hand, what can be more *encouraging* than to see that such abundant provision has been made for us? What can a sinner desire more? What clearer evidence can he have of the Father's willingness to receive him? What firmer ground of confidence can he desire, than the sacrifice and intercession of the Lord Jesus? What further aid can he want, who has the Holy Spirit to instruct, assist, and sanctify him? Surely none can despond, however great their guilt may be, or however inveterate their corruptions.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who never seek access to God in prayer—

[Our Lord told the Jews that “if he had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but that now they had no cloak for their sin.” How truly may this be said to those, who refuse to come to God in the way pointed out for them! Surely they must be without excuse, and, if they continue in their sin, without hope also: for in no other way than this can we draw nigh to God; nor will God in any other way draw nigh to us.]

2. Those who fear that they shall not find acceptance with God—

[There can be no ground for such fears, provided we really desire to go to God in his appointed way. The more we consider the condescension and grace of God in providing such means for our recovery, the more must we be persuaded that God will cast out none that come unto him. Only let us “open our mouths wide, and he will fill them.” We may “ask what we will in the name of Jesus, and it shall be done unto us.”]

3. Those who enjoy sweet communion with God—

[This is the highest of all privileges, and the richest of all enjoyments. To have access to the Father with boldness and confidence is a foretaste even of heaven itself. Let us then abound more and more in the duty of prayer; for when we can say with the Apostle, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ,” we may also add with a full assurance, “And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”]

MMCII.

THE EXALTED PRIVILEGES OF TRUE CHRISTIANS.

Eph. ii. 19—22. *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

IT is well for Christians to contemplate their high privileges. But, in order to estimate them aright, it is necessary that they should bear in mind the state in which they were, previous to their embracing the Gospel. The difference between the Jews and Gentiles was great; yet scarcely greater than that between the nominal and the real Christian. The nominal Christian, though possessed of many external advantages, is, with respect to the spiritual enjoyment of them, on a level with the heathen; or rather, I should say, below the heathen, inasmuch as his abuse of those advantages has entailed upon him the deeper guilt. We may therefore apply to the unconverted Christians what St. Paul speaks of the Ephesians in their unconverted state; “They are without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world^a.” From this state however they are delivered, as soon as they truly believe in Christ. They are then, as my text expresses it, “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” The exalted state to which they are brought is represented by the Apostle under two distinct metaphors: they are made,

- I. The people of God, amongst whom he dwells—
They are “fellow-citizens with the saints”—

^a ver. 12.

[Bodies that are incorporated, whether in cities, boroughs, or societies of any kind, have their peculiar privileges, to which others who belong not to them are not entitled. Thus it is with the saints, who are formed into one body in Christ, and have the most distinguished privileges confirmed to them by a charter from the court of heaven. That charter is the Gospel, in which all their immunities and all their claims are fully described. What *externally* belonged to the Jewish nation at large, is *internally* and *spiritually* made over to them: "to them belong the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises^b:" yes, all that God has revealed in his Gospel, all that he has promised to his believing people, all that he has engaged to them in his everlasting covenant, all that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob enjoyed on earth, and all that they now possess in heaven, all without exception is theirs; "All things are theirs when they are Christ's." They are "citizens of no mean city," seeing that "they are come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God^c:" and whatever pertains to that is the lot of their inheritance.]

They are also "of the household of God"—

[As in the days of old there was an outer court for the Gentiles, and an inner court into which the native servants and children of Jehovah were privileged to enter, so now believers have access to God as his more immediate children and servants. They go in and out before him with a liberty unknown to the natural man; they hear his voice; they enjoy his protection; they subsist from day to day by the provision which he assigns them: the family to which they belong comprehends "an innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in heaven," together with myriads who are yet on their way to Zion: but all regard him as their common Head, their Lord, their Master, their Father and their Friend.]

Exalted as this privilege is, it is far surpassed by that which is contained under that other metaphor,

II. The temple wherein he dwells—

The whole body of true believers is the temple of the living God—

[Their foundation properly is Christ. But, in the text, the Church is said to be "built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets," because they with one voice testified of Christ; and on their testimony the Church is built. This

^b Rom. ix. 4.

^c Heb. xii. 22.

is the import of what our Saviour said to Peter; “Thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build my Church:” he did not mean, that he would build it on *the person* of Peter, but on *the testimony* of Peter just before delivered, namely, that “Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God^d.” Of the Church Christ is also “the chief corner-stone,” which, whilst it supports the building, connects the parts of it together, and gives it stability through the whole remaining superstructure.

The building raised on this foundation consists of “living stones^e,” all selected by sovereign grace, and with unerring wisdom “fitly framed together,” so as mutually to confirm and strengthen one another, and collectively to constitute an edifice for the Lord. Various degrees of labour are bestowed on these, according to the situation they are to occupy. Some, which are designed for a more conspicuous place in that building, have many strokes: others, which have a less honourable place assigned them, are sooner and more easily brought to the measure of perfection which is necessary for them.

But, in all, this work is carried on silently, and in a way unnoticed by the world around them. As in the temple of Solomon, “every stone was made ready before it was brought thither, so that there was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house while it was in building^f;” so it is in this spiritual building: every stone is fitted in secret: the work is carried on in each, without attracting the notice and observation of men: but all will at last be found so precisely fitted for their respective stations, as to demonstrate the infinite skill and unerring wisdom of the Divine Architect.]

The end for which this structure is raised, is, the inhabitation of the Deity—

[For this end fresh converts are “added to the Church daily, even such as shall be saved.” For this end the work is carried on and perfected in the heart of every individual believer. For this end all the means of grace, like the scaffolding, are continued, till the whole shall have received its final completion. For this end the Holy Spirit is imparted to all, so that all are compacted together, standing firm on the one foundation, and united to each other by indissoluble bonds. And at last the Deity shall take possession of it, as he did in the days of Solomon, when by the bright cloud he filled the house, so that the priest could no longer stand to minister before him^g.

In all this honour every saint partakes. Every one, even in his individual capacity, is a temple of the Lord^h, and has the

^d Matt. xvi. 16—18.

^e 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

^f 1 Kings vi. 7.

^g 1 Kings viii. 10, 11.

^h 1 Cor. vi. 19.

Spirit of God dwelling in himⁱ. “In his heart Christ dwells by faith^k :” and, through the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit, “he grows continually, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Yes, this honour has the Church at large; and this honour have all the saints of every successive age.]

REFLECTIONS—

1. How thankful should we be for such inestimable privileges !

[Believers, whoever ye are, ye were once lying in the quarry, as insensible as any that are still there. It was not by any agency of yours, no, nor for any superior goodness in you, that ye were taken thence; but purely by God’s power, for the praise of the glory of his own grace. He it is that has made the difference between you and others, between you also and your former selves. O! “look unto the rock, whence ye have been hewn, and to the hole of the pit, whence ye have been digged.” Never forget what ye once were, or what ye would still have continued to be, if God, of his own good pleasure, had not brought you thence, and made you what ye now are.

Be thankful also for the means which God, of his own infinite mercy, is yet using with you, to carry on and perfect his work in your souls. If ye have many strokes of the hammer, complain not of it: you have not one too many, not one that could be spared, if you are to occupy aright the place ordained for you. Lie meekly and submissively before your God; and let him perfect his work in his own way.

And contemplate the end for which you are destined, even “to be an habitation of God, through the Spirit,” to all eternity! Shall not this prospect make you “joyful in all your tribulation?” Shall so much as an hour pass, and you not give praise and thanksgiving to your God? Look forward to the end, even to “this grace that shall be given you at the appearing of Jesus Christ;” and beg of your God and Saviour not to intermit his work one single moment, till you are rendered completely meet for the station you are to hold, and the honour you are to enjoy in the eternal world.]

2. How studious should we be to walk worthy of them !

[This improvement of our privileges we should never overlook: it is the use which the inspired writers continually teach us to make of them. Are we the temples of the Holy Ghost? we must be far removed from all connexion with

ⁱ John xiv. 17, 23.

^k Eph. iii. 17.

ungodly men¹ — — — and from all hateful and polluting passions^m — — — And in us must be offered up continually the sacrifices of prayer and praiseⁿ; from which “God will smell a sweet odour,” and by which he will eternally be glorified. Surely “holiness becomes God’s house for ever;” and “this is the law of the house,” that every part of it, and its very precincts, even to “its utmost limits, should be holy^o.” Labour then for this. Consider “what manner of persons ye ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness:” and, as every vessel of the sanctuary was holy, so let your every action, your every word, your every thought, be such as becometh your high calling and your heavenly destination.]

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 16, 17.

^m 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

^o Ezek. xliii. 12.

EPHESIANS, III. 8.

See Sermons on 1 Tim. i. 11. where it forms the SECOND Sermon of a series.

MMCIH.

ANGELS MADE WISER BY THE GOSPEL.

Eph. iii. 10. *To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.*

CHRISTIANITY is altogether a deep stupendous mystery; such as could never have entered into the mind of man; such as never could have been devised by the highest archangel in heaven. Even subordinate parts of it, such as, the calling of the Gentiles, and the uniting of them in one Church with the Jewish people, are spoken of under this character, even as a “mystery, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit; even that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel.” Indeed, so mysterious was this particular appointment in the eyes of the

Apostle Paul, that, in the contemplation of it, he exclaimed, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out^a!" It is upon that subject primarily that the Apostle is speaking in the whole preceding context. He declares himself to have been expressly ordained by God as "a preacher to the Gentiles," that, through him "*all men*," not Jews only, but Gentiles also, might "see what was the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, to the intent that now unto the *angels also* might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God." Here the mystery which he refers to is the *Gospel*, in which are contained "the unsearchable riches of Christ," and in which also is pre-eminently displayed "the manifold wisdom of God."

In unfolding this great subject, I shall endeavour, as God may help me, to set forth,

I. The manifold wisdom of God, as exhibited in the Gospel—

Verily, it is wonderfully displayed,

1. In making salvation possible—

[As far as any finite intelligence could see, it was impossible for man to be saved, when once he had transgressed the law of God: for the honour of God's law demanded the execution of its sanctions on those who had violated its commands. Divine justice must be satisfied; nor could it in any way relax its claims of vengeance. The truth of God, also, was pledged to inflict on man the penalty of death; nor could the decree, once passed, be in any wise rescinded. What then could be done? Shall mercy triumph at the expense of all the other perfections of God? Shall it be said, that God has no regard for the honour of his law, for the rights of justice, for the sacredness of truth? Shall the holy God be thus divested of the attribute of holiness, in order that unholy beings may escape the sentence which, by their iniquities, they have incurred? It cannot be: yet how shall man be saved without it? Here the wisdom of Almighty God found out an expedient, which should at once solve every difficulty,

^a Rom. xi. 33.

and open a way for the exercise of mercy, in perfect consistency with every other perfection of the Deity. A surety shall be found; a substitute for sinful man; one, by whose obedience the law should be honoured; by whose sufferings, also, justice shall have its claims fully satisfied; by executing the penalty of transgression upon whom, as the representative of our fallen race, shall truth be kept inviolate; and the holiness of the Deity shall not be tarnished, even though the sinner be re-admitted to the bosom of his God. This one point of substitution clears the whole. But how can this be? To stand in man's place, he must be *a man*; and, to render his substitution available for the whole race of mankind, he must be possessed of *infinite dignity* and worth. Both these things combined in the substitute that Divine wisdom provided. God's co-equal, co-eternal Son was sent to take our nature upon him; and, in that nature, to obey the law which we had broken, and to endure the penalty which we had incurred. Thus was salvation brought within the reach of fallen man.]

2. In devising a salvation suitable to man—

[Desperate, beyond measure, was the state of man. Not the fallen angels themselves were more incapable of restoring themselves to the favour of their God, than he. But in the provision which Divine wisdom made for him was every want supplied. Was he laden with guilt? it shall be removed by a sacrifice. Was he lying under a curse? he shall be delivered from the curse, by one "becoming a curse for him." Did he need a righteousness wherein to stand before God? a righteousness shall be wrought out for him, and imputed to him. Is he, by reason of his natural depravity, incapable of enjoying God's presence, or of doing his will? A new nature shall be given him, and, "through the strength of Christ, he shall be enabled to do all things^b." Is he unable to do any thing whereby he shall merit any of these things? they shall all be given to him freely, "without money and without price^c." Is he, even when restored, unable to keep himself? the Lord Jesus Christ shall "carry on and perfect in him the work he has begun^d." May that enemy, who assaulted and ruined him in Paradise, yet prevail over him again? "his life shall be hid with Christ in God," beyond the reach of harm; so that when Christ, who is his life, shall appear, he "shall be secured to appear with him in glory^e." Nor is this salvation suited to man's necessities in its provisions only, or in the freedom with which it is bestowed: the means by which it shall

^b Phil. iv. 13.

^d Phil. i. 6.

^c Isai. lv. 1.

^e Col. iii. 3, 4.

be communicated are also precisely such as his necessities require: he has nothing to do, but simply to look to Christ by faith; and all these blessings shall flow down into his soul precisely as health did into the bodies of the dying Israelites, the very instant they looked to the brazen serpent. The only difference between them shall be, that, whereas the Israelites looked but once, and had their health completely restored, the sinner must look to Jesus continually, and derive from him such gradual and progressive communications as his necessities require. All "this, I say, is by faith, that it may be by grace, and that the promise may be sure to all the seed^f."

3. In appointing a salvation so conducive to his own glory—

[By this wonderful device, the substitution of God's only dear Son in the place of sinners, God not only prevented any dishonour accruing to himself by the exercise of mercy, but actually secured more glory to himself than he ever could have derived from any other source. Justice would doubtless have been honoured, if the whole human race had been consigned over to the curse which they had merited. But how much more was justice honoured, when God's co-equal, co-eternal Son was subjected to its stroke; not because he had committed sin himself, but because he had taken upon him the sins of others! How highly was it honoured, when not the smallest measure of its claims could be set aside; but Jesus, as our representative, was constrained to pay the utmost farthing of our debt, before one single soul could be liberated from its obligations to punishment! And how was the law honoured! It would have been honoured, indeed, by the obedience of *man*: but how was it honoured by having *God himself*, in an incarnate state, subjected to its dominion; and by the determination, that not any child of man should ever be saved, except by pleading Christ's obedience to the law, as his only ground of hope! Well does the prophet say, "He hath magnified the law, and made it honourable^g." As for holiness, O how bright it shines, in this mysterious dispensation. Not a sinner shall be saved, that does not acknowledge his desert of everlasting perdition; and that has not a perfect righteousness wherein to appear before God; or that does not plead for mercy at the Saviour's hands as much for the smallest defect in his best deeds, as for the most flagrant transgression that he ever committed. I may add, too, that truth is no less honoured, seeing that, rather than there should be the smallest departure from it, God's only dear Son should have its utmost denunciations fulfilled in him, and not a sinner be saved, who

^f Rom. iv. 16.

^g Isai. xlii. 21.

did not plead this very execution of God's judgments as the reason for their being averted from himself.

May we not, in the review of these things, adopt the language of the Apostle, and say, "O the depths!" Verily this "wisdom is manifold;" and in this salvation are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge^h."

But my text, whilst it speaks of the wisdom contained in the Gospel, leads me particularly to declare,

II. The instruction which the angels themselves derive from the revelation of it to the Church—

The angels, from the first moment of their creation, saw much of God: but of him, as exhibited in the Gospel, they could have no conception, till that fuller revelation of him was given to the Church.

Then the angels began to see,

1. The extent of his perfections—

[They had seen his wisdom, power, and goodness, in the works of creation. They themselves, indeed, were bright monuments of these perfections. The justice of God, too, they had beheld in very awful colours, in the judgments inflicted on myriads of their fellows, who were once as holy and as happy as themselves. They had seen in what profusion *love* had poured its blessings on the innocent. But could it extend to the guilty? Could it extend so far as to send his only-begotten Son to stand in the place of the guilty, and to bear their punishment? Impossible! Shew love to the guilty, and anger to the innocent? yea, and shew anger to the innocent, as the only way of shewing love to the guilty? It could not be: it must be abhorrent from the very soul of a holy God so to act. Yet, behold, Divine Wisdom did so ordain to act. But how could *Justice* concur in this? Can that be brought to execute vengeance on one that is innocent, for the sake of sparing others that were guilty? Methinks that the sword, if seized for such an end, would fall from the very hands of Justice, and refuse to do its office. Yet did Justice proceed thus far, and not suffer Mercy to prevail in behalf of any child of man, till its claims were thus satisfied by the sinner's Surety. We may conceive, that, from what they had seen of the goodness of God, they would believe him ready to exercise mercy, on a supposition it were compatible with his honour in all other respects: but that he

^h Col. ii. 3.

should devise *such* means for the exercise of mercy, and be capable of carrying those means into effect, they could never have imagined. Yet, in the provisions of the Gospel they beheld all this, not only contemplated, but carried into effect. We wonder not, that, on attaining such views of the Deity, they sang, "Glory to God in the highest;" for, verily, "great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the fleshⁱ."]

2. The harmony of his perfections—

[Of this there was not a trace in all the universe besides. But here "mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace kissed each other^k." Here *that* was visible, which the prism of the philosopher discovers in the rays of light. There are, in light, rays of a more sombre hue, as well as others that are more brilliant; and it is the perfect union and simultaneous motion of them all that constitutes perfect light. Such light is God himself. His perfections are various, and of a diversified, though not of an opposite, aspect. But they all combine in Christ, "in whose face is seen the light of the knowledge of the glory of God^l." Yes, he is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person^m." In this mysterious dispensation, they saw not only every perfection of the Deity exercised so as not to interfere with each other, but every perfection of the Deity, that was most adverse to the sinner's welfare, made his most strenuous friend and advocate. Justice, which had demanded the execution of the penalty upon him, now demands his liberation from it; because every thing that justice could require has been done by the sinner's Substitute and Surety. If, in human judicatures, justice require a debtor to be sent to prison, it pleads no less powerfully for his liberation from prison, the very instant that his debt is paid. And exactly thus is Justice itself now become the sinner's friend. In like manner, truth and holiness are also friendly to the happiness of man; because they demand *for him* the execution of every engagement that has been made in their behalf by God, with their great Head and Representative, the Lord Jesus Christ. How infinitely was this beyond the conception of the angelic powers, before it was revealed to the Church! But by the Gospel, into which they are continually searching, they have obtained the knowledge of it. St. Peter, speaking of this very salvation, says, "Which things the angels desire to look into." In the most holy place of the temple there were, the ark, which contained the law; and the mercy-seat upon the ark; and two

ⁱ 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^k Ps. lxxxv. 10.

^l 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^m Heb. i. 3.

ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 12.

cherubim upon the mercy-seat, *bending down*, in order to search into the mysteries contained in it°. The great mystery there shadowed forth was, the Lord Jesus Christ (the true Ark), containing in himself, and having fulfilled for us, the law: and God the Father, extending mercy to all (for the mercy-seat was of exactly the same dimensions as the ark) who should come to him by Christ. This mystery they saw unravelled when Christ came into the world, and executed his high office for the salvation of man. But in it there are yet depths utterly unexplored, even by the highest archangel; and the wonders of wisdom and love contained in it will be more and more unfolded, as long as there shall continue any portion of that mystery unfulfilled.]

3. The felicity arising from this exercise of his perfections—

[When man fell, the angels could expect no other than that the fate of the fallen angels would be his. But, when a salvation was revealed, whereby millions, numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore, shall be restored to God, with what surprise and joy must those benevolent beings be penetrated! We are told, that even “one sinner turning” with penitential sorrow to his God causes joy throughout all the angelic hosts. What then must they have felt, when this mystery, whereby millions of millions shall be saved, was revealed! How must they be transported with joy at the continual increase of the Lord’s people on earth, and the constant influx of perfected saints to the regions of bliss, and the consequent augmentation of the choir, by whom praise is continually ascribed to God and to the Lamb! Nor is their surprise a little heightened by this, that whereas, if men had continued upright, they would have possessed a glory commensurate only with a *creature’s* righteousness, they are now clothed with the righteousness of their *Creator* himself, and put into possession of a glory and felicity proportioned to it. With what amazement must the whole of this dispensation fill them!

Besides, their own happiness is also greatly augmented by this: for though they have never sinned, and therefore derive not salvation from Christ, as we do, their views of the Deity are marvellously enlarged: and, as their happiness, from necessity, arises from beholding the glory of God, it must have been increased in proportion as their knowledge of this mystery has been enlarged. All this they had yet to learn, before that salvation was proclaimed to man: but, by the revelation of it to the Church, they have been instructed in it; and their views of it, and blessedness arising from it, will yet be more

and more enlarged, till the “mystery itself be finished,” and every redeemed soul be perfected in bliss.]

From this wonderful subject we may SEE,

1. What guilt they contract who pervert the Gospel of Christ—

[A blending of any thing with the merits of Christ is, as St. Paul informs us, a substitution of “another Gospel” in the place of that which is revealed; or rather, it is “a perversion of the Gospel of Christ^p.” And how many are there who are guilty of this? In fact, it is with the utmost difficulty that any one is kept from this sin. All are ready to lean to their own righteousness, and, in one way or other, to look to themselves for something to recommend them to God, and to entitle them to his favour. But, whoever does this, makes the cross of Christ of none effect^q. Shall this declaration be thought harsh? Look then, and see what this conduct does: see what contempt it pours on the wisdom of God, and on all that he has done for the salvation of man. See how it dishonours and denies every perfection of the Deity. In blending any thing of our own with the work of Christ, we deny that justice was so inexorable, or holiness so immaculate, or truth so inviolate, or mercy itself so great, as the Gospel represents: and we assert, in opposition to it all, that man, with all his infirmities, can by his own good works lay a foundation for boasting before God. Brethren, this is, of all sins, most venial in the sight of man, but most hateful in the sight of God. Nor is this without reason: for other sins withstand only the authority of God; whereas this makes void all the counsels of his love, and all the purposes of his grace. I say then to you, as the Apostle does, that whoever he be that entertains in himself, or encourages in others, such a conceit as this, must be accursed; yea, “though he were an angel from heaven, I repeat it, he must, and shall be, accursed^r.”]

2. What folly they commit who neglect it—

[The angels are not interested in this mystery as we are: yet, behold, how earnest they are in searching into it! Yet, to the generality of those who call themselves Christians, it is little better than “a cunningly-devised fable.” Methinks, if men were fond of science of any kind, they might be expected to find pleasure in this: for there is no mystery so deep, there is none so certain, there is none which will so richly repay the labour of investigation, as this. This observation I should make, if this mystery were merely a matter for speculation

^p Gal. i. 6, 7. ^q Rom. iv. 14. Gal. v. 2, 4. ^r Gal. i. 8, 9.

and research. But it is not to be regarded by any one in that light: it is not a subject to occupy the meditations of a theorist, but to engage the devoutest affections of the soul. It is our very life: it is that in which the eternal welfare of our souls is bound up^s. It prescribes the only possible way of acceptance with God: and he who will not walk in that way, not only renounces all hope of heaven, but plunges himself infallibly into all the miseries of hell. Dear brethren, awake to your duty: awake to your most urgent and important interests: and let the salvation of Christ become the one object of your pursuit. You perceive that St. Paul was sent to preach, that "ALL MEN" might know the fellowship of this mystery. Seek, then, to answer the ends for which it is transmitted to you in the written word, and the ends for which it is preached to you by every minister of Christ.]

3. What happiness is reserved for the saints in heaven—

[The happiness of the holy angels consists mainly in this, in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing^t." And how much more must this be the case, with those who can say, "He hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood^u!" There can be no doubt but that our happiness will consist in contemplating all the wonders of Christ's love, and in beholding the glory of God's perfections as displayed in the great mystery of redemption. And if here, in this world, a little glimpse of Christ is sufficient to fill us "with joy unspeakable and glorified," what must a full discovery of his glory effect upon our souls? Here even Paul himself saw Christ only "as in a glass darkly:" but in heaven, the least and meanest of the saints shall behold him "face to face." Shall we not, then, long for the time when we shall be translated to that blissful place, where we shall have the full vision of his glory, and see him as we are seen, and "know him as we are known^x?" Let us, then, contemplate this blissful scene, till we have already obtained Pisgah views of its excellency, and foretastes of its blessedness. And, whatever hastens us to that land, or prepares us for it, let us welcome it from our inmost souls; "looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of Christ;" that "when his glory shall be revealed, we may rejoice before him with exceeding joy^y."]]

^s Deut. xxxii. 47.

^x 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^t Rev. v. 11, 12.

^y 1 Pet. iv. 13.

^u Rev. i. 5.

MMCIV.

PRAYER THE MEANS OF THE RICHEST BLESSINGS.

Eph. iii. 14—19. *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*

MANY who espouse the cause of religion when it is in flourishing circumstances, are apt to decline from it when their profession exposes them to any great trouble. The Ephesians had heard of Paul's imprisonment at Rome, and were in danger of turning from the faith through the fear of persecution. St. Paul cautions them against being intimidated by the tribulations which he endured for their sakes; and assures them, that they ought rather to consider it as an honour, that their cause had been so vigorously maintained by him; and that he was suffering persecution for asserting their rights in opposition to the bigoted and blood-thirsty Jews. Precluded as he was from prosecuting his ministerial labours for their good, he spent the more time in prayer for them. This was a liberty of which none could deprive him: yea, rather, the more his body was confined, the more his spirit was enlarged on their behalf. He considered them as members of the same family with all the Church militant and Church triumphant, of which Christ is the Head; and, with the profoundest reverence and humility, he implored for them all those blessings which he desired for himself, and which were suited to their state:

I. The strengthening communications of the Spirit—

[The first blessing which a child of God would desire, is strength; because he longs as much to execute his Father's will, as he does to enjoy his favour. The occasions on which

he needs an increase of strength, are many and urgent. He has many trials to endure; many temptations to withstand; many duties to perform: and in himself he is insufficient for any one of these things. But "God will give his Holy Spirit unto them that ask him." He will "strengthen us in our inner man," so that our wills shall be active, our affections lively, our resolutions firm, our exertions effectual. It is no small measure of "might with which he will strengthen us:" the greater our necessities, the more abundant will be his liberality towards us: he will bestow "according to the riches of his own glory:" so that, if the utmost efforts of Omnipotence were necessary for us, they should be put forth in our behalf; and God's own ability should be the measure of his communications to us.]

II. An abiding sense of Christ's presence—

["The believer longs to enjoy the presence of God in his soul, because he finds by experience that the "joy of the Lord is his strength." Nor shall he be disappointed of his hope, if he only spread his desires in prayer before God. There is no habitation, not even heaven itself, in which Christ more delights to dwell, than in the heart of a believer. He has promised to "come and make his abode with his people," as he did of old in the tabernacle and temple, or as he did in the flesh that he assumed. In them he will exert his power; and to them he will reveal his glory: he will "manifest himself to them, as he does not unto the world."

But, in order to bring him into the soul, we must exercise faith. It is faith that apprehends, and pleads his promise: it is faith that brings him down from heaven: it is faith which opens the door of the heart for his admission into it: it is faith which detains him there; and which gives us a realizing sense of his presence. It is by prayer that we must obtain this blessing, and by faith that we must enjoy it.]

III. An enlarged discovery of his love—

[The presence of Christ in the soul is desired, in order to a more lively sense of his love. Now "the love of Christ has a breadth and length, a depth and height," which are utterly unsearchable^a: it extends to the remotest corners of the earth: it reaches "from everlasting to everlasting:" it descends to the very confines of hell itself, and exalts to thrones of glory those who are its favoured objects. In its full extent, it "passes the knowledge" of men or angels; but in a measure

^a Properly speaking, nothing has more than three dimensions; length, breadth, and thickness. The Apostle divides the last into two, in order the more strongly to express his idea.

it is "comprehended by all the saints." Men's capacity to comprehend it, is proportioned to their growth and stature in the Church of Christ: those who are but infants, have only narrow and contracted views of it; while those who are advanced to manhood, stand amazed at its immeasurable dimensions.

But in order that we "may be able to comprehend it," we ourselves should be "rooted and grounded in love" to him. As a sense of his love is necessary to beget a holy affection in us towards him, so a love to him disposes our mind to contemplate, and enlarges our capacity to comprehend, his love to us. Each in its turn is subservient to the promotion of the other: but under circumstances of trial, which endanger the steadfastness of our profession, we are more especially called to have our love to him "rooted and grounded," so as to be immoveable amidst all the storms with which it may be assailed: and then, from every exercise of our own love, we shall acquire a greater enlargement of heart to admire and adore his love to us.]

IV. A repletion with all the fulness of God—

[The Apostle's prayer rises at every successive step, till he arrives at a height of expression, which, if it had not been dictated by inspiration, one should have been ready to condemn as blasphemy. Amazing thought! May we offer such a petition as this? Yes: there is indeed in the Deity an essential fulness, which is incommunicable to his creatures: but there is also a fulness which he does and will communicate^b. In him are all the perfections of wisdom and goodness, of justice and mercy, of patience and love, of truth and faithfulness: and with these he will "fill" his people, according to the measure of their capacity; so that they shall be "holy as he is holy, and perfect as their Father which is in heaven is perfect." If any possess but a small portion of his perfections, it is owing to their being "straitened in themselves; for none are straitened in him."

But how is this to be attained? Will repentance effect it? No. Will mortification procure it? No: that which alone will avail for this end, is an enlarged discovery of the love of Christ; and therefore the Apostle prays for the one *in order to* the other. Indeed, high thoughts of a creature's kindness to us have a natural tendency to produce in us a resemblance to him: but a sense of Christ's love has an irresistible influence^c to transform us into his image, and to "fill us with all his fulness."]

^b Πλήρωμα θεότητος we cannot have, Col. ii. 9. This is πλήρωμα Θεοῦ.

^c 2 Cor. v. 14. συνέχει.

REFLECTIONS—

1. How much do the saints in general live below their privileges!

[Who that is conversant with the religious world, would imagine that such things as are mentioned in the text were ever to be attained? One is complaining of his weakness and insufficiency; another, of his darkness and distance from Christ: one is harassed with doubts and fears; another bewails his emptiness and the prevalence of sin. Alas! alas! how different would be their experience, if they were more constant and importunate in prayer! What strength and comfort, what light and holiness, might they not enjoy! Beloved brethren, do but contemplate the state to which the Ephesians were taught to aspire, and you will blush at your low attainments, and be confounded before God for your partial acquaintance with his mercies.]

2. How rich is the benefit of prayer!

[There is nothing for which “effectual and fervent prayer will not avail^d.” However “wide we open our mouths, God will fill them^e.” We may search out all the promises in the Bible, and take them, like notes of hand, for payment: our God will never refuse what is good for us: his generosity is unwearied, his faithfulness inviolate, his treasury inexhaustible. O that there were in us such a heart, that we could go to him at all times, renewing our petitions, and taking occasion, from every fresh grant, to enlarge our desires, and be more importunate in our entreaties! Beyond the Apostle’s request we cannot perhaps extend our conceptions: but short of them we would not stop. Ambition here is virtue. Let no strength but omnipotence, content us: no presence but the actual dwelling of Christ in our hearts, satisfy us: no view of his love but a comprehension of it in all its dimensions, limit our researches: nor any communication short of all the fulness of God, allay our appetite for his blessings.]

^d Jam. v. 16.

^e Ps. lxxxi. 10.

EPHESIANS, III. 18, 19.

See Sermons on 1 Tim. i. 11. where it forms the FOURTH Sermon of a series.

MMC.V.

GOD'S POWER TO BLESS HIS PEOPLE.

Eph. iii. 20, 21. *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

MAN is a dependent creature, and therefore should be instant in prayer: but he is also a creature infinitely indebted to his God, and therefore he should abound also in thanksgiving. The Apostle's direction to us is, that "in every thing, by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, we should make our requests known unto God^a." This rule he himself observed, as well in relation to those for whom he interceded, as for himself. He has been pouring out his heart before God on behalf of the Church at Ephesus; and he concludes the prayer with that animated doxology which we have just read.

It is our intention to consider,

I. His representation of the Deity—

God has given a wonderful display of his omnipotence in the visible creation: and he is ever ready to exert it in the behalf of those who call upon him. There is no limit to his power to bless his people—

[We may ask what we will, and he will do it for us^b. We may "ask" for the pardon of all our sins, the supply of all our wants, and for support in all our conflicts; and he will grant our requests. We may then bring forth all the promises in the Bible, and "ask" for the fulfilment of them all to our souls: and they also shall be granted. We may then collect all the most comprehensive expressions that language can afford us, and offer them in prayer before him; and still his liberality will keep pace with our petitions.

After having exhausted all the powers of language, we may proceed to stretch our imaginations beyond the limits of distinct and accurate conception: and, provided the things be proper for him to give, and for us to receive, he can, and will, bestow them. He will do for us not only what we ask, but

^a Phil. iv. 6.

^b John xv. 7.

what we “think;” he will do it “all” and “above” all, and “abundantly” above all, yea, “exceeding” abundantly above all that we can ask or think.

What a glorious view does this give us of the power and goodness of our God !]

The works which he has already wrought in us, are a specimen and pledge of what he will yet do for us—

[Let us survey what he has done, and is doing, in every one of his saints. *He has quickened a dead soul.* This is as great a work as that which he performed in raising Christ from the dead, and setting him above all the principalities and powers of earth, of hell, of heaven; and, in that view, it displays the exceeding greatness of his power^c.

He has turned the tide of our affections back again to the fountain head. They were flowing with an irresistible current towards the creature; and God has arrested them in their course, and caused them to flow with rapidity and strength towards himself. We admire this phenomenon in rivers near the sea: but the spiritual change is an incomparably greater display of omnipotence than that; it is nothing less than a new creation^d.

He preserves a spark alive in the midst of the ocean. What is the principle of grace within us, but a spark of heavenly fire kindled in us by the Spirit of God? But, instead of finding any thing in the heart to keep it alive, it meets with every thing calculated to repress its ardour. Yet though immersed, as it were, in an ocean of corruption, it maintains its vigour, and burns brighter in proportion to the efforts made for its extinction.

He has taken “a brand out of the burning,” and is fitting it for a conspicuous ornament in his temple. We are in ourselves only like branches of a vine, of which “no use can be made, not even a pin to hang any vessel thereon^e,” moreover, we still bear the marks of the fire upon us: yet is God forming and polishing us, that we may be an ornament to heaven itself: so that, when we appear there, the Workman shall be both “admired in us, and glorified in us^f.”

These things shew “the power which now worketh in us, according to which” God will exert himself in future. What he has done, and is yet doing, is an earnest of what he will do: it is the commencement of that work which will be perfected in glory.]

^c Eph. i. 18, 19.

^e Ezek. xv. 3, 4.

^d 2 Cor. v. 17.

^f 2 Thess. i. 10.

On this delightful view of the Deity the Apostle grounds,

II. His doxology—

That we may have a just and comprehensive view of this, let us consider,

1. What is that “glory” which is due to God—

[We certainly must not limit the word “glory” to the mere idea of praise. We must understand it as corresponding with the fore-mentioned character of God; and as importing *admiration, entreaty, confidence, thanksgiving*.

We cannot contemplate the power and goodness of God, without being filled with *admiration* and love. Instead of giving him glory, we should dishonour him in the highest degree, if we did not adopt the language of the Psalmist, “Who in the heavens can be compared unto the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord? O Lord God of Hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee?”

And to what purpose do we admire God's power to bless his people, if we do not present before him our *entreaties*? It is in vain that we confess him able to answer and exceed our petitions, if we do not carry to him our sins to be forgiven, and our wants to be supplied. If we believe that he will fill our mouths, we cannot but open them wide^h.

We must also, under the most trying circumstances, maintain an unshaken *confidence* in him, as able and willing to save. It was by this that Abraham “gave glory to God:” “He staggered not at the promises through unbelief, but was strong in faithⁱ,” believing, that if he should reduce his beloved Isaac to ashes, “God was able to raise him up again^k,” and to accomplish all that he had spoken respecting him.

As for the offering of *thanksgiving*, that is the first and most obvious meaning of the Apostle in the text. We must not think of God merely as “*able*” to do such great things, but as *willing* also: and for the encouragement which this representation of the Deity affords us, we must bless, and praise, and magnify his name. The words of the Psalmist are exactly suited to the occasion; “Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things: and blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen^l.]

2. How, and by whom, it should be offered—

^g Ps. lxxxix. 6, 8.

^h Ps. lxxxi. 10.

ⁱ Rom. iv. 19—21.

^k Heb. xi. 17—19.

^l Ps. lxxii. 18, 19.

[It is “by Jesus Christ” alone that any blessings descend from God to us: and it is by him that all our services must ascend to him. However devout and excellent the offering be, it cannot come to God but by Jesus Christ. It neither has, nor can have, any merit in itself: it must derive all its value from the merit of his death, and the virtue of his intercession. This is the uniform testimony of the inspired writers^m: and it is of infinite importance that we should be grounded in the knowledge of it.]

But who are they that are to give him glory? The Apostle says, “To him be glory in *the Church*.” He does not exclude the *world*, as though they had no reason to bless their God; but because he knew that they had no disposition to bless him. They do not pray to him: how then should they receive answers to prayer? and how should they discover his ability to exceed our highest thoughts? But the Church are “a people nigh unto Godⁿ”: they are in the habit of praying to him, and of receiving answers to their prayers: and they know, by sweet experience, his power and willingness to save^o. They therefore are disposed to give him glory: and they would gladly spend eternity itself^p in advancing his honour, and singing his praise.

And is there one amongst you that does not add, “Amen?” If there be one such ungrateful wretch, let him know, that God is as “able to destroy as he is to save^q.” But let us hope rather that all of you are now like-minded with the Apostle, and that you will go from this place to “praise the Lord, who hath dealt wondrously with you^r.” Take then with you those delightful strains of David; “Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are any works like unto thy works: for thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone^s.”]

^m Heb. xiii. 15. 1 Pet. ii. 5.

ⁿ Ps. cxlviii. 14.

^o Ps. cxxvi. 3.

^p εἰς πάσας τὰς γενεὰς τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων is inimitable: the force of it cannot be preserved in a translation.

^q Jam. iv. 12.

^r Joel ii. 26.

^s Ps. lxxxvi. 8—10.

MMCVI.

A CONSISTENT WALK ENJOINED.

Eph. iv. 1—3. *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

THE end of all true religion is practice : and the perfection of practice is a habit of mind suited to the relations which we bear to God and man, and to the circumstances in which from time to time we are placed. It is not by external acts only that we are to serve God : the passive virtues of meekness, and patience, and long-suffering, and forbearance, are quite as pleasing in his sight, as the most active virtues in which we can be engaged. Hence St. Paul, in entering on the practical part of this epistle, entreats the Ephesian converts to pay particular attention to these graces, and to consider them as the clearest evidences of their sincerity, and the brightest ornaments of their profession. He was at this time a prisoner at Rome : but no personal considerations occupied his mind. He had no request to make for himself ; no wish for any exertions on their part to liberate him from his confinement : he was willing to suffer for his Lord's sake ; and sought only to make his sufferings a plea, whereby to enforce the more powerfully on their minds the great subject which he had at heart, their progressive advancement in real piety.

With a similar view we would now draw your attention to,

I. His general exhortation—

First, let us get a distinct idea of what the Christian's "vocation" is—

[It is a vocation from death to life, from sin to holiness, from hell to heaven.

Every Christian was once dead in trespasses and sins^a — — — But he has heard the voice of the Son of God speaking to him in the Gospel^b — — — and, through the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit, he "has passed from death unto life^c;" so that, though once he was dead, he is now alive again ; and though once lost, he is found^d — — —

From the time that he is so quickened, he rises to newness of life^e. Just as his Lord and Saviour "died unto sin once, but, in that he liveth, liveth unto God," so the Christian is

^a Eph. ii. 1. Tit. iii. 3. ^b John v. 24, 25. 1 Thess. i. 5.

^c 1 John iii. 14.

^d Luke xv. 24.

^e Rom. vi. 4, 5.

conformed to Christ in this respect, “reckoning himself dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ^f.” By his very calling he is “turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God^g,” and engages to be “holy, even as God himself is holy^h” — — —

Once the believer was a “child of wrath, even as othersⁱ,” and, had he died in his unconverted state, must have perished for ever. But through the blood of Jesus he is delivered from the guilt of all his sins, and obtains a title to the heavenly inheritance — — — Hence he is said to be “called to the kingdom and glory of his God,” and “to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ^k.”

Thus is the Christian’s “a high,” “a holy,” and “a heavenly calling.”]

Such, believer, being thy vocation, thou mayest easily see what kind of a walk that is which is suited to it—

[Dost thou profess to have experienced such a call? “Walk worthy of the” *profession* which *thou makest*, the *expectations* thou hast *formed*, and the *obligations* which are *laid upon thee*.

It is not any common measure of holiness that befits a person professing such things as these. How unsuitable would it be for one who pretends to have been “born from above,” to be setting his affections on any thing here below; or for one who is “a partaker of the Divine nature,” to “walk in any other way than as Christ himself walked!” — — —

And, seeing that you “look for a better country, that is, an heavenly,” should you not aspire after it, and “press forward towards it, forgetting all the ground you have passed over, and mindful only of the way that lies before you? — — — Should not “your conversation be in heaven,” where your treasure now is, and where you hope in a little time to be, in the immediate presence of your God?

If you have indeed been so highly distinguished, should you not “live no longer to yourselves, but altogether unto Him who died for you and rose again?” Should any thing short of absolute perfection satisfy you? Should you not labour to “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God^l?”

This then is what I would earnestly entreat you all to seek after, even to walk worthy of your high calling, or rather, “worthy of the Lord himself,” who hath “called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”]

^f Rom. vi. 9—11.

^g Acts xxvi. 18.

^h 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 2.

^k 1 Thess. ii. 12. and 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

^l Col. iv. 12.

But that we may come more closely to the point, we will call your attention to,

II. The particular duties he inculcates—

In order to adorn our Christian profession, we must especially keep in view,

1. The cultivation of holy tempers in ourselves—

[Without this, nothing can ever prosper in our souls. “Lowliness and meekness” are unostentatious virtues; but they are of pre-eminent value in the sight of God^m. They constitute the brightest ornament of “the hidden man of the heart,” which alone engages the regards of the heart-searching God. In the very first place, therefore, get your souls deeply impressed with a sense of your own unworthiness, and of your total destitution of wisdom, or righteousness, or strength, or any thing that is good. No man is so truly rich as he who is “poor in spirit;” no man so estimable in God’s eyes, as he who is most abased in his own. With humility must be associated meekness. These two qualities particularly characterized our blessed Lordⁿ: of whom we are on that account encouraged to learn^o; and whom in these respects we are bound to imitate, “having the same mind as was in him^p.” Let these dispositions then be cultivated with peculiar care, according as St. James has exhorted us; “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge amongst you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom^q.”

And whilst we maintain in exercise these graces, let us also be long-suffering, forbearing one another in love. However meek and lowly we are in ourselves, it cannot fail but that we must occasionally meet with things painful from others. The very graces which we manifest will often call forth the enmity of others, and cause them to act an injurious part towards us. But, if this should be the case, we must be long-suffering towards them, not retaliating the injury, nor harbouring resentment in our hearts, but patiently submitting to it, as to a dispensation ordered by Infinite Wisdom for our good. But, where this is not the case, there will still be occasions of vexation, arising from the conduct of those around us: the ignorance of some, the misapprehensions and mistakes of others, the perverseness of others, the want of judgment in others, sometimes also pure accident, will place us in circumstances of difficulty and embarrassment. But from whatever

^m 1 Pet. iii. 4.

ⁿ 2 Cor. x. 1.

^o Matt xi. 29.

^p Phil. ii. 5.

^q Jam. iii. 13.

cause these trials arise, we should shew forbearance towards the offender, from a principle of love; not being offended with him, not imputing evil intention to him, not suffering our regards towards him to be diminished; but bearing with his infirmities, as we desire that God should bear with ours.

Now it is in preserving such a state of mind in ourselves, and manifesting it towards others, that we shall particularly adorn the Gospel of Christ: and therefore, in our endeavours to walk worthy of our high calling, we must particularly be on our guard, that no temper contrary to these break forth into act, or be harboured in the mind.]

2. The promotion of peace and unity in all around us—

[As belonging to the Church of Christ, we have duties towards all the members of his mystical body. There ought to be perfect union amongst them all: they should, if possible, be “all joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment^r.” But, constituted as men are, it is scarcely to be expected that all who believe in Christ should have precisely the same views of every doctrine, or even of every duty. But whatever points of difference there may be between them, there should be a perfect unity of spirit: and to preserve this should be the constant endeavour of them all. All should consider themselves as members of one family, living under the same roof: if the house be on fire, they all exert themselves in concert with each other, to extinguish the flames: they feel one common interest in the welfare of the whole, and gladly unite for the promotion of it. Thus it should be in the Church of Christ. Every thing tending to disunion should be avoided by all; or if the bonds of peace be in any degree loosened, every possible effort should be made to counteract the evil, and re-establish the harmony that has been interrupted. A constant readiness to this good office is no low attainment; and, when joined with the graces before spoken of, it constitutes a most useful and ornamental part of the Christian character. Attend then to this with great care. Shew that you “do not mind your own things only, but also, if not chiefly, the things of others.” Shew, that the welfare of the Church, and the honour of your Lord, lie near your heart: and let no effort be wanting on your part to promote so glorious an object. Be willing to sacrifice any interest or wish of your own for the attainment of it; even as Paul “became all things to all men,” and “sought not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be saved.”]

^r 1 Cor. i. 10.

And now, let me, like the Apostle, make this the subject of my most earnest and affectionate ENTREATY. Consider, "I beseech you,"

1. Its aspect on your own happiness—

[It is the consistent Christian only that can be happy. If there be pride, anger, or any hateful passion indulged, "it will eat as doth a canker," and destroy all the comfort of the soul; it will cause God to hide his face from us, and weaken the evidences of our acceptance with him. If then you consult nothing but your own happiness, I would say to you, "Walk worthy the vocation wherewith ye are called; and especially in the constant exercise of humility and love."]

2. Its aspect on the Church of which you are members—

[It is impossible to benefit the Church, if these graces be not cultivated with the greatest care. In every Church there will be some, who, by unsubdued tempers, or erroneous notions, or a party-spirit, will be introducing divisions, and disturbing the harmony which ought to prevail. Against all such persons the humble Christian should be on his guard, and oppose a barrier. And it is scarcely to be conceived how much good one person of a humble and loving spirit may do. If "one sinner destroyeth much good," so verily one active and pious Christian effects much. Let each of you then consider the good of the whole: consider yourselves as soldiers fighting under one Head. Your regimental dress may differ from that of others; but the end, and aim, and labour of all, must be the same; and all must have but one object, the glory of their common Lord.]

3. Its aspect on the world around you—

[What will the world say, if they see Christians dishonouring their profession by unholy tempers and mutual animosities? What opinion will they have of principles which produce in their votaries no better effects? Will they not harden themselves and one another in their sins, and justify themselves in their rejection of the Gospel, which your inconsistencies have taught them to blaspheme? But if your deportment be such that they can find no evil thing to say of you, they will be constrained to acknowledge that God is with you of a truth, and to glorify him in your behalf. Especially, if they see you to be one with each other, as God and Christ are one, they will know that your principles are just, and will wish to have their portion with you in a better world^s.]

^s John xvii. 21—23.

4. Its aspect on your eternal welfare—

[In all the most essential things, all the members of Christ's mystical body are of necessity united: there is "one body," of which you are members: "one Spirit," by which you are animated; one inheritance, which is the "one hope of your calling;" "one Lord," Jesus Christ, who died for you; "one faith," which you have all received; "one baptism," in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, of which you have all partaken; one God and Father of all, who "is above all," by his essential majesty, and "through all," by his universal providence, "and in you all" by his indwelling Spirit^t: and shall you, who are one in so many things, be separated from each other so as not to be one in Christian love? It cannot be: your love to each other is the most indispensable evidence of your union with him: and, if you are not united together in the bonds of love in the Church below, you never can be united in glory in the Church above. If ever then you would join with that choir of saints and angels which are around the throne of God, be consistent, be uniform, be humble; and let love have a complete and undisputed sway over your hearts and lives.]

^t ver. 4—6.

MMCVII.

CHRISTIAN UNITY.

Eph. iv. 4—6. *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

IT is often urged, as an objection against Christianity, that those who profess it are not agreed respecting the doctrines which it inculcates: and we are triumphantly urged to come to an agreement amongst ourselves, before we attempt to proselyte others to our religion. That persons *calling themselves* Christians differ widely from each other, is readily acknowledged. But it must be remembered, that Christianity is not a mere theory, which leaves men at liberty in relation to their practice: it is a religion which requires its votaries to have their whole souls brought into subjection to it, and cast, as it

were, into its very mould : and those who affect not a conformity to its doctrines, will deny the doctrines themselves ; having no alternative, but to set aside the requirements, or to condemn themselves for their disobedience to them. But between *real* Christians there is, on all the fundamental points of religion, a surprising agreement, even such an unity as does not exist on any other subject under heaven. Every true believer, whether learned or unlearned, feels himself to be a sinner before God ; dependent altogether on the blood of Christ to purge him from his guilt, and on the Spirit of Christ to renew and sanctify his soul. The necessity of universal holiness, too, is equally acknowledged by all ; so that, whatever difference there may appear to be between the different members of Christ's mystical body, it is only such as exists in the countenances of different men ; the main features being the same in all ; and the diversity being discoverable only on a closer inspection.

That this truth may the more fully appear, I will take occasion, from the words before us, to shew,

I. The foundation which the Gospel lays for unity—

The unity of the Gospel is carried to a great extent—

[The whole Christian Church is brought by the Gospel into “one body,” of which Christ is the head, and all true believers are the members^a. This body is inhabited by “one Spirit,” even the Holy Ghost, who pervades the whole, and animates it in every part. It is his presence only that gives life ; and were he withdrawn for a moment, the soul would be as incapable of all spiritual motion, as a dead corpse is of all the functions of the animal life. To “one hope are we all called, even to an inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us.” The “one Lord” of all is the Lord Jesus Christ, who “purchased the Church with his own blood,” and presides over it as “Lord of all,” and will judge every member of it in the last day. To all of them there is but “one faith ;” to which all, without exception, must adhere, and by which alone they can be saved. Into this new-covenant state they are all admitted by “one baptism,” “in the name of the Father,

^a 1 Cor. xii. 12.

and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” And of all there is one God and Father, “who is above all,” by his almighty power; “and through all,” by his superintending providence; “and in all,” by the constant operation of his Spirit and grace.]

All this may well serve as a foundation for unity, amongst those who profess the Gospel—

[The force of this observation is universally acknowledged, in reference to the corporeal frame. The whole human frame proceeds from one source, is subject to the same wants, nourished by the same supplies, and affected with the same lot. In reference to that, it is judged reasonable that every part should have the same care one for the other; and that every member should sympathize with the rest, whether in a way of joy or sorrow, according as circumstances may require^b. All idea of a separate interest is quite excluded; and the happiness of every individual part is bound up in the welfare of the whole. Much more, therefore, may all disunion be proscribed in so sacred a body as the Church, where not merely the prosperity of the different members is at stake, but the honour of Almighty God also, and the interests of the whole world.]

Accordingly, we find universal harmony provided for, in,

II. The unity it enjoins—

It requires an unity,

1. Of sentiment—

[This is not to be expected in *every* thing: for, where the mind is so constituted as ours is, and possesses such different measures of information, and beholds subjects from such different points of view, it is not possible that there should be a perfect agreement of sentiment upon every thing. But it may well be expected to prevail, so far at least as to prevent dissension and division in the Church of God. This the Apostle inculcated with all possible earnestness: “I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment^c.” A departure from this rule is declared to be a proof of grievous carnality^d: and, if fostered in the soul, and promoted in the Church, it is judged a sufficient ground for the most marked disapprobation from

^b 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26.

^c 1 Cor. i. 10.

^d 1 Cor. iii. 3.

every child of God: "Mark them who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them: for they that are such serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly" and corrupt appetites^e.]

2. Of affection—

[Love is the grace which most adorns the true Christian: it is properly his distinctive mark^f. It is not to be interrupted by party distinctions; which, instead of justifying an alienation from each other, should themselves, as far as possible, be buried in oblivion. In the body, no one member can say to another, "I have no need of you:" the least and lowest has its appropriate office, as well as those whose powers are of a superior order: nor does its difference of form or office cause it to be overlooked, or its welfare to be despised. But herein the Christian world is doubtless very defective. Minor differences and distinctions are magnified among them into occasions of mutual aversion; insomuch, that a circumstantial difference, in relation to the mere externals of religion, often sets persons as far asunder as they are even from professed heathens. But let not Christianity be blamed for this. The evil arises solely from that corruption of the human heart which Christianity is intended to subdue and mortify. And I cannot but regard the change which has taken place in this respect, through the influence of the Bible Society, as a blessing of peculiar magnitude to the whole Church of God. The duty of all, to whatever denomination of Christians they may happen to belong, is, to "love as brethren;" yea, to "be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one to another." The true pattern is that which was set us on the day of Pentecost^g — — — To all, therefore, I would say, with the Apostle, "If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded; having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind^h."]]

3. Of conduct—

[As immortal beings, we all have one great pursuit, which we ought to follow with our whole hearts, and in comparison of which all other things should be as dung and dross. We should all resemble the twelve tribes of Israel, in their journey through the wilderness. All kept their appointed places; those who led, not despising those who followed; nor those who moved in the rear envying those who led the van.

^e Rom. xvi. 17, 18.

^f Rom. xii. 10.

^g Acts iv. 32.

^h Phil. ii. 1, 2.

All surrounded the tabernacle, as the first object of their unvaried solicitude ; and all looked forward to Canaan, as the crown and recompence of all their labours. So should it be with us. To advance the cause of God in this world, and to reach the promised land, should be the objects nearest to all our hearts. In this, then, let us all unite : “ forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, let us press forward for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Let us, I say, as many as be perfect, “ be thus mindedⁱ.”]

ⁱ Phil. iii. 14, 15.

MMCVIII.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

Eph. iv. 7, 8. *Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.*

FROM the divisions which exist in the Christian Church, it has been said, by the enemies of Christianity, “ First agree amongst yourselves, before you attempt to proselyte others to your religion.” That divisions do exist, is undeniable : and that they are a disgrace to our holy religion, must be confessed. But still, whilst we mourn over these differences, we believe that there is no society under heaven that is more agreed in all essential points than the Church of Christ. In the great essential points of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and the necessity of obedience to all the commands of God, there is no difference amongst any true Christians, whether they be found amongst the most enlightened philosophers or the most uncivilized barbarians. In our bodily frame there are many members, which, though widely different from each other in their use and structure, are in perfect harmony with each other, as being all actuated by the same spirit, harmoniously employed for the good of the whole. And this is precisely what exists in the Church of Christ : “ There are *diversities of gifts*, but *the same Spirit* :

and there are *diversities of administrations*, but *the same Lord*: and there are *diversities of operations*; but it is *the same God* who worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal: for to one is given, *by the Spirit*, the word of *wisdom*; to another, the word of *knowledge*, by the same Spirit; to another, *faith*, by the same Spirit; to another, *the gifts of healing*, by the same Spirit; to another, *the working of miracles*; to another, *prophecy*; to another, *discerning of spirits*; to another, *divers kinds of tongues*; to another, the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that *one and the self-same Spirit*, dividing to every man severally as he will^a." This is exactly what the Apostle affirms in the passage before us: whatever differences there be amongst us, we should "forbear one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:" for, amidst all those differences, "there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all^b." Whatever differences are made, either in respect of gifts or graces, they are all made by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, agreeably to what had been foretold concerning him; as the Apostle says in our text: "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ: wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men."

In discoursing on these words, we shall be led to consider,

I. The obligations we owe to Christ—

On the primitive Church there were many special and miraculous gifts bestowed: in reference to which, the Apostle says of Christ, "He gave some, Apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers^c." But, whilst a distinction was made amongst the members of the Church

^a 1 Cor. xii. 4—11.

^b ver. 2—6.

^c ver. 11.

in reference to *gifts*, there were *graces* bestowed indiscriminately on all, though in different degrees, according to the will and pleasure of the Giver of them all, the Lord Jesus Christ. And thus it is at this time :

There is amongst men a great diversity both of gifts and graces—

[Some are endowed with richer talents than others originally, at their first coming into the world. In early infancy, a distinction is visible, both in respect to corporeal and mental endowments; weakness and imbecility being the lot of some, whilst strength and energy are the happy portion of others. Wealth and poverty also place men far asunder, in reference to their station in society; insomuch that, to one who considers only the outward appearance, the most elevated and the most depressed of men seem almost to belong to different orders of creation, rather than to different ranks of the same order. *Something* of the same may be noticed in reference to the graces of men. I say, *something* of the same: for, where any portion of *real* grace is, there is such an elevation of character, that there is a far less distance between the extremes of those who are born of God, than there is of those who are yet in their natural and unregenerate state. But St. John speaks of “little children, young men, and fathers,” in the Church; and consequently there must of necessity be so much of disparity in real saints as will justify the use of these appropriate and characteristic terms.]

But, whatever be the measure of any man's gifts, he is altogether indebted to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the true source and giver of them—

[We see the truth of this observation in reference to intellectual powers; which, even before any means have been used for the improvement of them, are found much stronger in some than in others. And, though I readily acknowledge that talent depends, in some measure, on the cultivation of the human mind, yet I must say, it is God alone who inclines or enables us to cultivate it with effect. In like manner it must be confessed, that much also may depend on our use of the means of grace; but still I must say, that it is “God alone who gives us either to will or to do;” and, consequently, whatever flows from our willing and doing must be his gift also. Remember then, I pray you, to whom you are indebted for every grace you possess. Have you any measure of *repentance*? it is conferred on you by the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you any measure of *faith*? “it has been given you by

him to believe." Have you any measure of *holiness*? this also has come from Him, "who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working." Yet we must not suppose that no guilt attaches to us for the want of these graces: we are bound to repent, and believe the Gospel, and to obey the commands of God; and shall be justly doomed to punishment, if we abide in impenitence or unbelief. Yet, for all these graces, so far as we possess them, we must confess our obligation to the Lord Jesus Christ, who, in the distribution of them, acts according to his own sovereign will: so that we have no ground for glorying, if we possess a larger measure; nor for repining, if we possess a less. We may "covet earnestly, indeed, the best gifts;" but, whatever be the measure of them which has been conferred upon us, we must be thankful for them, and improve them diligently, for the benefit of man, and the honour of our God.]

Whilst we acknowledge our obligations to Christ, it will be proper to inquire,

II. Whence it is that he is empowered to confer them—

Respecting this we are informed by David, who prophesied concerning our blessed Lord, and foretold that he should be invested with the power which is here ascribed to him.

Let us first understand the prophecy itself—

[The psalm, from whence it is taken, was written by David, on occasion of his carrying up the ark to Mount Zion. David, having subdued all his enemies, desired to honour God by bringing up the ark from Kirjath-jearim to Mount Zion, and placing it in the tabernacle there, as its permanent abode. In celebrating this event, he goes back to the days of Moses, when all the hosts of Egypt were destroyed in the Red Sea; and the Hebrews, enriched with the spoils of Egypt, formed with them a tabernacle for the service of their God. In both events, the triumphs of Israel's God were seen, and the work of their Messiah was prefigured: "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them^d."]]

Now let us see the application of it to the Lord Jesus—

^d Ps. lxxviii. 18.

[Our blessed Saviour had now vanquished all his enemies upon the cross: "by death he had overcome death, and him that had the power of it, that is, the devil;" and "having spoiled principalities and powers, he triumphed over them openly upon the cross^e." In his ascension, like a mighty conqueror, he "led them captive," as it were, at his chariot-wheels: and as conquerors, in their triumphs, were wont to scatter gifts and largesses among the people, so he received from his heavenly Father the Holy Spirit, and poured him forth upon the Church, in all his gifts and graces, in order that "the most rebellious" of men might be converted to the Lord, and "the Lord God might dwell among them." The right to confer these gifts was founded on his previous conflicts and victories: and, when they were completed, the right was exercised, to the unspeakable benefit of the Church at that day; and not at that day only, but in all subsequent ages, even to the present hour.]

Now, then, SEE,

1. What reason we have to bless God for the events which are this day^f commemorated amongst us—

[The Apostle tells us, in the words following my text, that "Jesus ascended up far above all heavens, *that he might fill all things.*" This was the very end of his ascension. He had come down from heaven, that he might procure for us these blessings: and now he ascended up to heaven, that he might confer on us the fruits of his victories. The sun arises on the earth, that he may diffuse his benefits through the whole material creation: and in like manner the Sun of Righteousness is risen, to scatter forth his blessings upon fallen man. Does any one feel his need of grace, or mercy, or peace? let him remember, that the Lord Jesus Christ is ascended to heaven *on purpose to bestow them.* Had he not ascended, the Holy Ghost would never have been sent down to us: but now that Jesus "has received from the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost," no one needs to remain destitute of any spiritual blessing whatever. If it be said, we have been rebellious; I answer, our past rebellions will be no bar to the communication of his blessings to us, if only we be willing to lay down the weapons of our warfare, and to implore mercy at his hands. It is "for the rebellious" that he himself has received the gift; and on the rebellious he is willing to confer it. Let all then, without exception, rejoice in the evidence they have, that Christ has vanquished all their enemies; and in the certainty, that all who look to him shall

^e Col. ii. 15.

^f Ascension Day.

be enriched “out of his fulness, receiving grace” upon grace, and grace corresponding with the grace which there was in him.]

2. What rich measures of grace we are authorized to aspire after—

[Though we all ought to be thankful for the smallest measure of grace, we should never be satisfied till we have attained the largest. We are told by the Apostle, that we should “grow up into Christ as our living Head,” even “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ himself^g.” What a glorious object for our ambition is here! O brethren, be not straitened in your own bowels; for ye are not straitened in your God! The Lord Jesus, who first descended from heaven, and became incarnate for you, is now ascended to heaven in the very nature that he assumed for you: and well does he know all your wants and necessities, which he is as ready, as he is able, to supply. Open wide, therefore, your mouth, in supplication to him; and be assured, that he will give you a more abundant supply of his Spirit; nor will ever withhold his hand, till you are filled with all the fulness of God.]

g ver. 13, 15.

MMCIX.

THE USE OF A STATED MINISTRY.

Eph. iv. 11—16. *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*

IT is a truth never to be forgotten, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the fountain of life, and that “all our fresh springs are in him.” Unless this be borne in

mind, we shall never be able to do the will of God aright; nor will Christ ever be glorified by us as he ought to be. Hence the Apostle, after exhorting the Ephesian converts to walk worthy the vocation wherewith they had been called, reminds them, that, so far as they had been enabled to do this, they had done it through grace received from the Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to the predictions concerning him, had ascended up to heaven, and bestowed it upon them. One particular prediction to this effect he specifies; and then, commenting upon it, declares, that Jesus, having triumphed over all his enemies, had, after the manner of conquerors, who scattered gifts and largesses amongst their followers, conferred these and other blessings upon them. Of the other blessings he had bestowed upon his Church, the Apostle mentions some which were extraordinary and temporary, as apostles, prophets, and evangelists; and some which were ordinary and permanent, as pastors and teachers, whose office was to be continued for the benefit of the Church in all succeeding generations.

What the particular benefits were which the Church was to derive from these pastors and teachers, he then proceeds to notice, and sets them forth under a variety of most beautiful and instructive images. That we may enter more fully into the subject, we shall endeavour to shew,

I. The ends for which a stated ministry was ordained—

These were,

1. The perpetuating of a succession of duly qualified instructors in the Church—

[This seems to be the import of those words which first occur in our text, and which might perhaps have been more properly translated, “For the fitting of holy men for the work of the ministry for the edification of the body of Christ.” Amongst the Jews, especial care was taken that the knowledge of the true God should be transmitted to the latest generations: as David says; “God established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their

children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children^a." So under the Christian dispensation, care is taken, that there never shall be wanting a succession of persons duly qualified and authorized to transmit to every succeeding generation the knowledge of Christ, and of his Gospel. St. Paul says to Timothy, "The things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also^b." Were the ministerial office to cease, the Church itself would soon fall into decay: for though it is certain that the Scriptures are of themselves, when applied by the Holy Spirit to the soul, able to make men wise unto salvation, it is also certain, that the ministry of the word is, and ever has been, the chief instrument which God makes use of for the conversion of the world. A vision was given to Cornelius, and an angel sent to inform him where he might find an authorized instructor; and repeated visions were given to Peter, and not only given, but explained to him by the Holy Ghost, in order to remove his scruples, and prevail upon him to go to Cornelius, for the express purpose of honouring God's instituted means of communicating the knowledge of his Gospel. For the very same end was Philip directed, by the Holy Ghost, to go to the Ethiopian eunuch, and to open to him the portion of Scripture which he was reading. The Spirit might as easily have opened the eyes of the eunuch, without the intervention of Philip: but he chose to put the honour on the means which he had instituted; and to effect that by his minister, which he would not effect by the word alone.

In all ages shall such ministers be raised up, through the operation of the preached word; nor shall the Church cease to be supplied with them, till there shall remain no more members to be added to her, nor any further work to be wrought in those of which she is composed.]

2. The edification of the Church itself—

[The Church of Christ is his body: those who believe in him are his members: and every member has a measure of growth which it is destined to attain: and it is the completeness of the members in number and proficiency, that constitutes the perfection of the whole body. Towards this perfection the Church is gradually advancing. To help forward this good work is the office of God's servants, who are continually labouring for the good of the Church, and striving to edify her in *faith* and *love*. The ignorant they are to instruct; the

^a Ps. lxxviii. 5, 6.

^b 2 Tim. ii. 2.

weak they are to strengthen and establish; the wandering they are to bring back; and over every member are they so to watch, that all may be progressively fitted for the discharge of their respective offices, and that God may be glorified in all.]

But as the ministry can be effectual only through the medium of our own exertions, it will be proper to shew,

II. The use we should make of it—

It finds us sinners: it brings us to the state of saints: and when formed by it into one great community, it leads us to a performance of the duties we owe to all the members of that body. In each of these states we have duties to perform—

1. As sinners, we should seek that faith which alone will save us—

[There is but “one faith;” and one “knowledge of the Son of God,” in which we must be all agreed. In matters of minor importance we may differ from each other: but “the Head we must all hold:” we must simply look to the Lord Jesus Christ, as dying for us, and as making reconciliation for us by the blood of his cross; our hope must be in him, and in him alone: and, if we place the smallest dependence on any thing of our own, we can have no part in his salvation. In relation to this matter, there must be no diversity: perfect “unity” is required: and to bring you to this unity, is the great scope of our labours. Brethren, consider this; and inquire whether our ministry has had a proper influence upon you in this respect? Have you been made to feel yourselves guilty and undone; and have you fled to Christ for refuge, as to the one hope that is set before you? — — — Have you renounced all dependence whatever on yourselves; and are you daily looking to him as “made of God unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption?” — — — We say again, that if our ministry be not effectual to bring you to this, it is not a savour of life unto you, but a savour of death to your more aggravated condemnation.]

2. As believers, we should seek to “grow up into Christ in all things”—

[Whilst we are yet weak in the faith, we are in constant danger of being turned aside from the truth of God. Both men and devils will labour incessantly to draw us from the one foundation of a sinner’s hope. But we are to be “growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus

Christ." We are not to continue "as children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine:" we are to be aware of the devices of our enemies: we are to get a deeper insight into the great mystery of godliness: we are to become daily more and more established in the truth as it is in Jesus, so as to be proof against all "the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive." On whatever side we are assaulted, our enemies should find us armed. Are we attacked by the specious reasonings of false philosophy, or the proud conceits of self-righteous moralists, we should reject the dogmas both of the one and the other, and "determine to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified." "To him we should cleave with full purpose of heart," making daily more and more use of him in all his offices. As our Priest, we should confide more simply in the atonement he has offered for us, and in his continual intercession for us at the right hand of God. As our Prophet, we should rely on him more entirely to instruct us in the knowledge of God's will, and to guide us into all truth. As our King, we should look to him to put down all our enemies, and to bring every thought of our hearts into captivity to his holy will. In a word, we should live more simply and entirely by faith in him, receiving daily out of his fulness all that we stand in need of, and improving it all for the glory of his name.

Thus to establish you in Christ, is a further intent of our ministry; even to bring you to live in the same communion with him, as the members have with the head. You must feel that you have nothing in yourselves, but all in him: and whatsoever communications you receive from him, must be employed in executing his will, and in promoting his glory.]

3. As members of Christ's mystical body, we should seek to promote the welfare of the whole—

[In the natural body, all the members consult and act for the good of the whole: no one possesses any thing for itself only; but all being compacted together by joints and ligaments, and every joint, from the largest to the smallest, supplying a measure of unctuous and nutritious matter, each according to its ability, for the benefit of the member that is in contact with it, and for the good of the whole body, all grow together; and *that* from infancy to youth, from youth to manhood, till the whole has attained that measure of perfection which God has designed for it. Thus it must be in the mystical body of Christ's Church. Believers are no more independent of each other, than they are of Christ: as they are united unto him by faith, so are they to be united to each other by love. None are to consider any thing which they possess as private property, but as a trust to be improved for

the good of the whole. Nor are they to consider only that part of the body with which they are in more immediate contact, but the whole without exception; assured, that the happiness of the whole is bound up in the welfare of every part; and that all being connected by one common interest, all must labour together for one common end.

When this is attained, the intent of our ministry is fully answered. A life of faith, and a life of love, is that for which God has begotten us by his Gospel — — — But let me ask, Is this end answered upon us? Do we regard the whole Church of God, as well that part which is more remote, as that which is nearer to us, as members of our own body, entitled to all possible care and love? O that it were thus in every place under heaven! O that there were no schisms in this sacred body! But let there be no want of effort, on our part, to advance the temporal and spiritual welfare of all around us: let there be “an effectual working in the measure of every part, that so the body may be increased, and the whole be edified in love^c.”]

^c This may be easily improved for any subject connected with the ministry.

MMCX.

EDUCATION AND WALK OF CHRISTIANS.

Eph. iv. 20, 21. *But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.*

WE shall do well ever to remember, that Christianity is not a mere speculative theory, that is to inform the mind; but a great practical lesson, to renew the heart, and to bring us back to the state from whence we are fallen. The means which it prescribes for the attainment of its end, are doubtless most mysterious: but still the end is that for which the means are ordained; and the restoration of our souls to the Divine image must be our one constant and uniform pursuit. St. Paul ever bears this in mind. He sets forth, in the clearest view, and the most glowing colours, the wonders of redeeming love: but he ever comes to this at last, that we are to “be sanctified by the truth,” and that “the truth must set us free”

from all our spiritual enemies. He was, at the time he wrote this epistle, imprisoned at Rome : yet what did he desire of the Ephesian Church ? Did he request them to interest themselves in his behalf, that he might be restored to liberty ? No ; the thought did not so much as enter into his mind : the welfare of their souls was all his concern : “ I, therefore,” says he, “ the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy the vocation wherewith ye are called^a :” and again, “ This I say and testify in the Lord, that ye walk not as other Gentiles walk^b :” ye are instructed better : ye can never conform to their practices : no ; “ ye have not so learned Christ, if so be ye have heard him, and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.”

In these remarkable words, we see,

I. The Christian’s education—

“ He has been instructed by our Lord Jesus Christ himself.”

There is a teaching which proceeds from Christ himself—

[I readily grant, that, in learning from the inspired writings, we may properly be said to learn of Christ : for he himself said to his Apostles, “ He that heareth you, heareth me ; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me ; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me^c.” But it is evident that much more than this is contained in the words before us : in fact, here is a contrast drawn between those who learn by the word, or human teaching only, and those who learn of the Lord Jesus Christ himself : the former may find their instruction insufficient to regulate their life : the latter never can ; because Christ instructs the heart, to which nothing but Omnipotence can gain access. This teaching is sometimes ascribed, in Scripture, to *the Father* : “ Every man that hath heard and learned of *the Father*, cometh unto me^d.” Sometimes it is ascribed to *the Son* : “ No man knoweth the Father, but the Son, and he to whomsoever *the Son* will reveal him^e.” Sometimes it is ascribed to *the Holy Ghost* : “ The Comforter, which is *the Holy Ghost*, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things^f.” But the truth is the

^a ver. 1.

^b ver. 17.

^c Luke x. 16.

^d John vi 45.

^e Matt. xi. 27.

^f John xiv. 26.

same; since, whether it be the Father or the Son who instructs us, it is always by the agency of the Holy Spirit. To say exactly *how* Christ instructs us, is beyond our power: it is not by visions, or by voices, or by dreams, as in the days of old; but by opening to us the Scriptures, and giving us a spiritual perception of the truths contained in them. We know not how our own spirit operates on our body: yet we have no doubt but that it does; because the body obeys in all things the motions of the mind: so, though we cannot define the precise mode in which the Spirit of God operates on our spirit, we know, by the effects, that an influence is exerted by Him upon our minds, and that by that influence we are enabled to see and comprehend many things which to the natural man are utter foolishness^g.]

This teaching every true Christian receives—

[In matters of science, the Christian has no advantage above others: his progress will be regulated by laws that are common to every student. But in the concerns of the soul he has a decided superiority, above all his equals in age and learning. He has the Lord Jesus Christ for his instructor: his “heart has been opened by the Lord, as Lydia’s was, to attend to the things of God^h,” and his understanding has been opened to understand themⁱ.” It was by this teaching that Peter, a poor fisherman, was enabled to declare the true character of Christ, which the Scribes and Pharisees, with all their advantages, were not able to discern: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven^k.” If it be thought that this privilege was confined to the Apostles, or to the apostolic age, I answer, that it is the portion of all God’s people to the end of time; according as it is written, “All thy children shall be taught of God, and great shall the peace be of thy children.”]

Suited to this education is,

II. The Christian’s walk—

The Apostle tells us what this is: he tells us,

1. Negatively, what it is not—

[The state of the Gentile world is awful in the extreme. Whatever may be the conduct of a few amongst them, the great mass are *alienated from all good*, and *addicted to all evil*. As for God, they know him not, nor have any desire to know him. Their minds are altogether alienated from every thing

^g 1 Cor. ii. 9—12, 14.

ⁱ Luke xxiv. 45.

^h Acts xvi. 14.

^k Matt. xvi. 17.

which God would approve: they have no disposition but towards the vanities of this polluted world; nor, when they transgress what even their own consciences would dictate, do they feel that compunction of heart that would become them. The unenlightened amongst ourselves do not indeed resemble the Gentiles in some respects: they are free from open idolatry, and more limited perhaps in their sensual indulgences: but in an alienation from the life of God, and an addictedness to earthly vanities, they differ very little from the heathen world. But true Christians are of a very different mind: as the Apostle says, "Ye have not so learned Christ." No, indeed: the true Christian has not so learned Christ: he cannot "run to the same excess of riot" that ungodly men do; nor will he be conformed, in any of these vanities, to the world around him. He "comes out from the world, and is separate; and would not willingly touch the unclean thing;" much less revel in all manner of uncleanness: and this very separation from the world is that which chiefly incenses the world against him. He comes out from "the broad road which leadeth to destruction, and walks rather in that narrow path which leadeth unto life."]

2. Positively, what it is—

[The Christian, who has really heard Christ, and been taught by him *as the truth is in Jesus*, will adhere to *the truth as it is in Jesus*: he will labour that the full end of Jesus's incarnation and life and death should be realized in him. He will see how the truth was exemplified in Jesus; and will endeavour "so to walk, even as he walked." Not that he will be satisfied with any change in his outward conduct: he will seek to become a new creature; to put off the whole body of sin, with which he is encompassed; and to put on the whole body of righteousness, whereby he may approve himself to God. The life of God, from which the unenlightened is alienated, is that which he will cultivate to the utmost of his power; and in maintaining it, he will labour with all earnestness, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth unto that which is before, if by any means he may attain so rich a prize.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who desire to *understand* the Gospel—

[Remember what it is you have to learn: the Apostle calls it "learning CHRIST." This gives us the complete idea of all that a Christian needs to know. The Gospel is an exhibition of Jesus Christ: all that he is in himself, and all that he is to us, is there revealed: all the mysterious purposes of his grace; all the offices that he sustains in the work of

redemption; all that he has done and suffered; all that he is now doing; all that he has engaged to do; all that can be known of him, is there set forth; and there may we behold all the glory of the Godhead shining in his face. This, then, is what we have to learn: the knowledge of CHRIST is all and in all. Come, then, and sit at the feet of Jesus: come, and learn of him with all docility of mind, as little children: entreat him to take away the veil from your hearts, and to “manifest himself unto you as he does not unto the world.” Then shall you “behold his glory, even the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father;” and know Him, whom to know is life eternal. And let no one be discouraged because of his want of intellectual powers: for “what he has hid from the wise and prudent, he will reveal to babes and sucklings;” and “his strength shall be perfected in their weakness.”]

2. Those who desire to *adorn* the Gospel—

[Take not the world’s standard of duty as that which you should aim at: for I declare and “testify,” that that will not suffice; nor can you ever please God by such a measure of sanctification as the best of unenlightened men affect. No; “you must not walk as other Gentiles walk;” nor as the merely nominal Christian walks. You must soar far above him: you must see how Christ himself walked, and follow him in all his ways; being “pure as he was pure,” and “perfect as he was perfect.” And never imagine that you have yet attained. To your latest hour there will be remnants of “the old man to be put off;” and larger measures of “the new man to be put on.” It is not in your life and conversation merely that you are to be “renewed,” but in the entire “spirit of your mind:” from being earthly, sensual, devilish, you must become heavenly, spiritual, divine; and never cease, till you have attained to the full measure of the stature of Christ himself. This is to walk worthy of your vocation; and in this shall your “learning of Christ” most surely issue. If you truly hear *him*, and are taught by *him*, as the truth is in Jesus, you *cannot* so walk as the world around you walk; nor *can* you but “walk, as Christ himself walked.”]

MMCXI.

THE OLD MAN, AND THE NEW.

Eph. iv. 22—24. *That ye put off concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

CHRISTIANITY is universally professed amongst us: but many know little more of it than the name. They, who are in some measure acquainted with its principles, have, for the most part, learned it only from books and human instruction. But there are some who have learned it, as it were, from Christ himself. Their understandings have been opened, and their hearts instructed by his good Spirit. These are said to “have heard Christ, and to have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus^a.” These may be distinguished from the others by the effects of their knowledge. While the speculative Christian remains willingly ignorant of true holiness, the truly enlightened man labours to attain the highest measure of it that he can. *This* St. Paul represents as the infallible consequence of divine teaching: and his declarations respecting it set forth the sum and substance of a Christian’s duty.

I. Put off the old man—

There are many terms peculiar to the Holy Scriptures which need to be explained. Those in the text are of the greatest importance—

“The old man” is that principle of sin which actuates the unregenerate man—

[It is a *natural principle*. As a man consists of a soul with many faculties, and a body with many members, so does this principle, though but one, consist of many parts: pride, unbelief, &c. &c. constitute that body of sin, which is here denominated “the old man;” and it is called “old,” because it is coeval with our existence, and is derived from our first parents, after whose fallen image we were made. It is a *corrupt principle*. It is expressly called so in my text. All its *inward* “lustings” and desires are vitiated, and invariably discover themselves by the *external* fruits of a vain “conversation.” It is also a “*deceitful*” principle, continually representing good as evil, and evil as good: it constantly disappoints our expectations, making *that* to appear a source of happiness which never yet terminated in any thing but misery.]

This it is our duty to be “putting off”—

^a ver. 21.

[It is indeed no easy matter to effect this work; yet in dependence on God's aid we *may*, and *must*, accomplish it. We must *suppress its actings*. It will break forth, if not resisted, into all manner of evil^b: but we must fight against it, and “bring it into subjection^c.” Our eternal life and salvation depend on our “mortifying the deeds of the body^d.” Not contented with a partial victory, we must *check its desires*. A weight that may be easily stopped when beginning to roll, will prove irresistible when it is running down a steep declivity. We must check evil in its first rising, if we would not be overpowered by it: none can tell how far he shall go when once he begins to fall. We must therefore “crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts^e.” To do this effectually, we must *guard against its deceits*. We should examine our motives and principles of action. Sin is deceitful; the heart also is deceitful; and Satan helps forward our deceptions. That which is very specious in its outward appearance is often most odious to the heart-searching God. We must therefore bring every thing to the touchstone of God's word: we must “prove all things, and hold fast that which is good^f.”]

But we must not be satisfied with resisting sin. We must,

II. Put on the new man—

“The new man” is that principle which actuates the godly—

[It consists of many parts, as well as the evil principle. Humility, faith, love, &c. are among its most characteristic features. It is *divine in its origin*. It belongs to no man *naturally*; but is “new.” It is the gift of God, the work of his good Spirit. It is “created” within us, and is as truly the workmanship of God, as the universe itself is. All who possess it are said to be “God's workmanship, *created* in Christ Jesus unto good works^g.” It is moreover *holy in its operations*: all its motions and tendencies are holy. It works to transform us “after God's image.” It leads to an unreserved obedience to both tables of the law. It directs to “righteousness” towards man, and “holiness” towards God. Nor will it be satisfied with any semblance of religion, however specious. It labours uniformly to bring us to the experience of “*true*” holiness both in heart and life.]

This it is our duty to be putting on—

^b See the following context.

^d Rom. viii. 13.

^f 1 Thess. v. 21.

^c 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^e Gal. v. 24.

^g Eph. ii. 10.

[As the prodigal was not merely pardoned, but clothed in robes suitable to his new condition, so are the children of God to be adorned with virtues suited to the relation which they bear to their heavenly Father. We must be “renewed,” not in our outward actions only, but, “in the spirit of our minds:” the great spring of action within us must be changed, and “the new man” must reign in us now, as “the old man” did in our unregenerate state. Do we ask, How shall this great work be effected? We answer, *Encourage its motions, and exert its powers.* The new principle of life in us is as water, which seeks continually to extinguish the corrupt principle within us: and if, upon any temptation occurring, we watched carefully the motions of that principle, we should frequently, *perhaps* invariably, find it directing us to what is right. But it is “a still small voice” that cannot be heard without much attention, and it may be very soon silenced by the clamours of passion or interest: it is the voice of God within us; and, if duly regarded, would never suffer us to err in any great degree. It has also powers, which, like the members of the body, may be strengthened by exertion. Put forth its powers in the exercise of faith and love, and it will be found to grow as well as any other habit. Having indeed the tide of corrupt nature against it, its progress will not be so rapid, nor will it admit of any intermission of our labours: but the more we do for God, the more shall we be disposed, and enabled, to do for him. We must however remember not to address ourselves to this duty in our own strength: of ourselves we can do nothing; but if we rely on the promised grace of Christ, we shall be strengthened by his Spirit, and be “changed into his image from glory to glory.”]

We may IMPROVE this subject,

1. For conviction—

[If this progressive change be the necessary evidence of our being true Christians, alas! how few true Christians are there to be found! Yet nothing less than this will suffice. If we be really “in Christ, we are new creatures; old things are passed away, and, behold, all things are become new^h.” It is not an external reformation merely that we must experience, but a new creation. Let all reflect on this. Let all inquire what evidence they have of such a change having passed upon their souls. The voice of Christ to all of us is this; “YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN; except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of heavenⁱ.”]

2. For consolation—

^h 2 Cor. v. 17.

ⁱ John iii. 3, 7.

[Many are ready to despond because of the severe conflicts which they experience between the spiritual and the carnal principle in their souls. They say, If I were a child of God, how could it be thus? We answer, This is rather an evidence that such persons are partakers of a divine nature: if they were not, they would be strangers to these conflicts. Though they might feel some struggles between corruption and conscience, yea, and between reason and conscience, the one attempting to vindicate what the other condemns, they would know nothing of those deeper conflicts between the flesh and spirit, especially in reference to the secret exercises of the soul in its daily converse with God. These evince the existence of a new principle, though they shew that the old man still lives within them^k. Let not any then despond because they feel the remains of indwelling corruption, but rather be thankful if they hate it, and if they have grace in some good measure to subdue it. Let them trust in God to “perfect that which concerns them;” and look to him to “fulfil in them all the good pleasure of his goodness:” then shall they in due time “put off their filthy garments^l” altogether, and “stand before their God without spot or blemish” to all eternity.]

^k Gal. v. 17.

^l Zech. iii. 4.

MMCXII.

GRIEVING THE SPIRIT.

Eph. iv. 30. *Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

THE Holy Scriptures are not written after the manner of human systems, but often blend warnings with promises, and duties with privileges, in a way that by some would be thought to involve them in inconsistency. The Apostle, cautioning the Ephesians against various evils which he had observed amongst them, adds, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God;” in which expression he seems eventually to refer to those who had “grieved the Lord in the wilderness,” and had therefore been excluded from the promised land^a, and to those who “by rebelling against God had provoked his Holy Spirit, so that he was turned to be their enemy^b.” Yet at the same

^a Heb. iii. 10, 17.

^b Isai. lxiii. 10.

time he informs them, that the Holy Spirit had sealed them, as the Lord's property, unto the day of redemption, when he would claim them as his own. The advocates of human systems love not such apparent contrarieties : they would rather say, if they be sealed unto the day of redemption, how can they be in any danger of so grieving the Lord, as to be finally excluded from the heavenly Canaan ? or, if they be in danger of such a calamity, how can it be that they should ever have been sealed unto the day of redemption ? But we may safely leave these matters to God, who will clear up all such difficulties in the last day. That we may grieve the Holy Spirit, and that believers are sealed by him unto the day of redemption, is equally certain : nor is there any great difficulty in reconciling the two, to a mind that is truly humble and contrite ; because the liberty of man is not at all affected by the decrees of God : man never loses his proneness to fall, notwithstanding God's counsel shall ultimately stand : and therefore he needs at all times the caution in our text, whilst the encouragement afforded in it is at all times proper to animate his exertions.

But,—not to enter into nice disquisitions about difficulties, which, after all that can be said upon them, can never be entirely removed, — we shall proceed, with a view to practical improvement, to notice,

I. The inestimable benefit conferred upon believers—

Many are the offices which the Holy Spirit executes in the great work of redemption. He is the one Agent, by whom redemption is applied in all its parts. By him is life imparted to those who were dead in trespasses and sins : “ he convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment ; ” and “ glorifies Christ ” in the sight of all who are so instructed. But there is one office in particular of which we are now called to speak, namely, his sealing of believers unto the day of redemption. This is more especially dwelt upon by the Apostle, in the

first chapter of this epistle, where he says that the Ephesian converts, “after they had believed in Christ, had been sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, as the earnest of their inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession^c.” This office he executes upon all true believers;

1. By an eternal designation of them to God’s service—

[Such a seal most assuredly exists, and was made use of by Almighty God from all eternity. It was made use of in the consecration of his only dear Son to his mediatorial office; “for him hath God the Father *sealed*^d.” it was made use of also in the setting apart his chosen people to be his own peculiar treasure above all the people upon the face of the earth^e: “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this *seal*, The Lord knoweth them that are his^f.” In the appointment of Abraham and his posterity to be a holy nation and a peculiar people, we all see and acknowledge the exercise of sovereign grace; though we find it difficult to acquiesce in this idea in reference to the eternal states of men. But where shall we draw the line? or how shall we justify the dispensations of God towards the Jewish people, if we deny his right to exercise the same sovereignty towards all the sinners of mankind? The truth is, that fallen man has no claim upon his God: in that respect he is exactly on a footing with the fallen angels: and, if God be pleased to shew mercy to any, he may do so in any way, and to any extent that he shall see fit: and if he select any as objects of his mercy in preference to others, he does no more injury to the rest, than he would to the great mass of the fallen angels, if he were at this moment, for the display of his own glorious perfections, to liberate any number of them from the chains of darkness in which they are bound. He “has a right to do what he will with his own: nor ought our eye to be evil because he is good^g.” It is certain that the Lord hath from eternity “set apart him that is godly for himself^h,” and not because he *was* godly, or *would* be so, but because God of his own sovereign will and pleasure ordained him unto life: as St. Paul expressly tells us; “Whom God did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified: their call in this world, and their glorification in the next, originating altogether in the predestination of God from all eternityⁱ.]

^c Eph. i. 13, 14.

^d John vi. 27.

^e Deut. vii. 6.

^f 2 Tim. ii. 19.

^g Matt. xx. 15.

^h Ps. iv. 3.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 29, 30.

2. By the sanctification of their hearts and lives—

[This, if I may so speak, is the broad seal of heaven: “By their fruits ye shall know them:” “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.” By this seal the Thessalonian converts were so distinguished, that St. Paul did not hesitate to infer, from what he saw in them, that they were God’s chosen people: when he called to mind “their works of faith, and labours of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, he knew from it their election of God^k.” And on all true believers this seal is found: God’s “peculiar people are invariably found to be holy and zealous of good works^l.”

Now this consideration may well reconcile us to the exercise of God’s sovereign grace: for, if the idea of God’s choice being altogether uninfluenced by holiness, either seen or foreseen in the objects of his choice, appear to militate against the interests of morality, the circumstance of God’s having inseparably united this seal with the foregoing, sufficiently removes all fear on that head. In God’s mind, our sanctification is as much ordained as our final salvation: “We are chosen, *that we may be holy^m*,” and “elect unto obedienceⁿ,” and predestinated *to be conformed to the image of his Son^o*: and in this way alone will any one finally attain the salvation of his soul; since it is only *in*, and *by*, and *through* the means, that God has ordained the end: “He has from the beginning chosen us *to salvation*; but it is *through sanctification of the Spirit*, and belief of the truth^p.”]

3. By the manifestation of God’s love to their souls—

[The Holy Spirit is a “Spirit of adoption” in the hearts of God’s people^q: he is also a “Witness testifying of their adoption^r,” yea, he is to them, and within them, an earnest of their everlasting inheritance^s; “shedding abroad in their hearts that love of God,” which will constitute their happiness through eternal ages^t. In this also he operates as a *seal*, as St. Paul has said in reference to all true Christians: “Now he who establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also *sealed* us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts^u.”

By the first of these seals we are known to God alone: by

^k 1 Thess. i. 3, 4.

^l Tit. ii. 14.

^m Eph. i. 4.

ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 2.

^o Rom. viii. 29.

^p 2 Thess. ii. 13.

^q Rom. viii. 15.

^r Rom. viii. 16.

^s Eph. i. 13. 2 Cor. v. 5.

^t Rom. v. 5.

^u 2 Cor. i. 21, 22.

the second, we are discoverable to those around us: by the last, an assurance of our happiness is imparted to our own souls. And though the impression of the two last is not at all times equally clear and strong, yet is it the privilege of all to possess them; and in proportion only as these last exist, will the first be ascertained.]

In connexion with the privileges of believers, we may well consider,

II. Their duty towards their gracious Benefactor—

The Holy Spirit is here represented as a parent, who, from his tender solicitude for the welfare of his children, is deeply “grieved” when they defeat in any respect the purposes of his love towards them. Now we may grieve the Holy Spirit,

1. By departing from the truth in our principles—

[The particular office assigned to the Holy Spirit in the economy of redemption, is, to “glorify Christ,” by receiving of the things that are his, and “shewing them unto us^x.” Now in this office he delights: and when we duly appreciate the excellencies of Christ, and “behold his glory as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father,” then is the Holy Spirit delighted to dwell with us, and to carry on the whole work of grace in our souls. But when we suffer the wily “serpent to beguile us, and to turn us from the simplicity that is in Christ,” then is the Spirit grieved: for he is a jealous God, and especially jealous for the honour of that Saviour, whose cause he has espoused. Against two things then in particular we have to guard, namely, against philosophical subtleties on the one hand, and Jewish superstitions on the other. By both the one and the other of these was the Church of God rent, in the very first ages of Christianity; and thousands of souls were subverted by them. By the same are we also endangered. Our natural pride and self-conceit are ever at work, to add something to what God has revealed or to detract somewhat from it. Perhaps the simplicity of the Gospel is that which most offends the carnal mind. A simple life of faith upon the Son of God, as having loved us and given himself for us, is most difficult to be maintained. We want to *be* something, or to *do* something, that so we may share the glory of Christ, and ascribe some part of his honour to ourselves: but he *is* all, and *must be* all; and “all who glory, must glory in him

^x John xvi. 14.

alone^y”———By retaining in constant exercise this humble and childlike spirit, we shall obtain frequent tokens of God’s favourable acceptance: but by departing from it, we shall provoke him to hide his face from us.]

2. By dishonouring it in our practice—

[To this more especially does the Apostle refer, both in the preceding and following context. Unhallowed tempers and dispositions are most offensive to the Spirit of God. O that all the professors of religion throughout the world were made duly sensible of this truth! But, whether they consider it or not, God will not dwell where there is bitterness and wrath, and anger and clamour, and evil-speaking and malice, or an habitual want of a forbearing and forgiving spirit. Falsehood too in our words, and dishonesty in our dealings, and impurity in our hearts, will assuredly drive him from us, and bring down upon us the tokens of his displeasure: “If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy^z.” It is no uncommon thing to find those who profess religion low and miserable in their minds. But we should not wonder at it, if we knew what abominations are harboured in their hearts: we should rather wonder that God bears so long with them, and that his wrath does not break forth to consume them in an instant. Let us never forget this, that as well may light have fellowship with darkness, and Christ with Belial, as the Spirit of God abide with those who yield not to his sanctifying operations. If, instead of conforming ourselves to the mind that was in Christ, we rebel against him, we shall “vex his Holy Spirit, and provoke him to become our enemy^a.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who comply not with the written word—

[The word which is recorded in the Scriptures of truth is God’s word: it is altogether given by inspiration from the Holy Ghost. If therefore we comply not with *that*, we resist the Holy Ghost, and “do despite to *him*.” Consider this, ye who receive not the word with all humility of mind, or labour not to conform to it in your life and conversation: think, whom it is that ye resist and rebel against; even Him, who, if he depart from you, will leave you in a bondage from which you can never be delivered, and in misery from which you can never be redeemed^b. O learn to tremble at the word of God,

^y Here reference may be made to any “questions and strifes of words” which may be agitated in the Church: for they all, when unduly insisted on, grieve the Holy Spirit.

^z 1 Cor. iii. 17. ^a Isai. lxiii. 10. ^b Hos. iv. 17. and ix. 12.

and beg that your whole souls may be so melted and poured into its mould, as to assume its every feature, and be formed into the perfect image of your God.]

2. Those who rest in a mere formal compliance with it—

[You cannot deceive that blessed Spirit whose province it is to search the heart and try the reins. He requires “truth in our inward parts:” he requires that your heart be right with him; that you “walk in the Spirit,” and “pray in the Spirit,” and “live in the Spirit,” and give yourselves up altogether to his godly motions. Do not therefore dissemble with him, lest he give you up to your own delusions, and seal you up in utter impenitence to the day of final retribution. Of those who held the truth in unrighteousness, we are told that he gave them up to a reprobate mind. I pray you, bring not upon yourselves this heaviest of all judgments: but to-day, while it is called to-day, surrender up yourselves entirely to his guidance, that he may “make you perfect in every good work, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight through Christ Jesus^c.”]

3. Those who are endeavouring to please him in all things—

[The day of redemption is near at hand. O blessed day, when all the remains of sin and sorrow shall be for ever banished from the soul! Look forward to it; and order your every action, word, and thought, in reference to it. Pray to the Holy Spirit to work yet more and more powerfully upon you, in order to prepare you for your appearance before the judgment-seat of Christ. Guard against any sloth in the ways of God, lest, like the Church of old, you cause him to suspend the communications of his love^d. Pray to him to give you that white stone, which none but he who has it can appreciate, and which has on it the name written, which none but he who possesses it can read^e. Then shall you already even now enjoy a foretaste of your heavenly inheritance, and in due season “have an abundant entrance ministered unto you into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”]

^c Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

^d Cant. v. 2—6.

^e Rev. ii. 17.

MMCXIII.

FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

Eph. iv. 32. *God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you.*

IF a minister of Christ is bound to preach the Gospel with all plainness and fidelity, he is no less bound to guard it against abuse, and to inculcate on the professors of it the strictest conformity to the commands of God. St. Paul was careful to insist upon even the minutest parts of practical piety; and to shew, that the Gospel not only required, but had a direct tendency to produce, holiness, both in heart and life. In truth, if our religion do not prevail to regulate our tempers, and to correct every evil disposition of the soul, it is not sincere; nor will it ever be approved of God in the day of judgment. Yet, in enforcing practical duties, we should take care to urge them upon right principles; not as a forced obedience to the law, in order to obtain acceptance with God, but as a willing effort to adorn the Gospel, through which we have already been accepted of him. A sense of God's pardoning love should animate us, rather than a servile fear of his displeasure: and, whilst God's mercy to us should operate as a motive to obey him, it should also serve us as a pattern for our own conduct towards our offending brethren, whom we should "forgive, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us."

Now, it is a fact, that forgiveness is bestowed on men whilst they are yet in this world. And this truth I shall consider,

I. As revealed in Scripture—

The truth itself is fully declared—

[God, in proclaiming his name to Moses, represented himself chiefly under the character of a sin-pardoning God: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin^a." And the whole of his dealings with his people, in every age, have borne testimony to

^a Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

him in this view, as “a God delighting in mercy,” and as accounting “judgment a strange act,” to which he was utterly averse. The whole of the Scripture declarations may be comprised in that saying of the prophet, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon^b.” To cite the New Testament in confirmation of this truth is needless; seeing that, from one end of it to the other, it proclaims God as “rich in mercy unto all that call upon him.”]

The ground of all his mercies is also declared—

[All the favour that God bears to man is “for Christ’s sake.” This was shewn from the first moment that his designs of mercy were revealed to fallen man. There can be no doubt but that sacrifices were ordained of God, for the purpose of shadowing forth that great sacrifice which should, in due time, be offered for the sins of the whole world. For Abel offered his sacrifice in faith^c: but faith must have respect to the word of God; and, consequently, God must have previously made known to man the way in which alone a sinner should find acceptance with him. Indeed, though we are not expressly told that the animals, with the skins of which God clothed our first parents, were offered in sacrifice, I can scarcely doubt but that the whole mystery of the Gospel was revealed to them in that act; and they were taught, that through the sacrifice of Christ their iniquities should be forgiven, and that through the righteousness of Christ they should stand with acceptance before God. The whole of the Mosaic economy exhibited this truth in the most striking colours, in that no person could come to God but by sacrifice; and “without shedding of blood there was no remission of sins^d.” On this subject the New Testament expatiates in every part; referring our reconciliation with God to the atoning blood of Christ^e, and declaring that “no man cometh unto the Father but by Christ^f.” The whole labour of the Apostles was to make this known: “Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that *through this man* is preached unto you the *forgiveness of sins*; and *by him* all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses^g.”]

In my text, the Apostle not only asserts this truth, but speaks of it,

II. As experienced in the soul—

^b Isai. lv. 7.

^c Heb. xi. 4.

^d Heb. ix. 22.

^e 2 Co^r v. 19.

^f John xiv. 6.

^g Acts xiii. 38, 39.

Many will not admit that any one can know his sins forgiven. And I readily acknowledge, that it is a point on which a man may easily deceive his own soul, especially if he judge of it by any other criterion than that which God himself has proposed. If the life and conversation bear witness to us that we are the Lord's, then may we safely indulge the hope that we are accepted of him.

God has, in former ages, given to men an assurance of his favour—

[To Abel this was given by some visible sign, which excited the envy and wrath of his brother Cain^h. David, on the very first acknowledgment of his transgression, was informed by Nathan that his sin was pardonedⁱ; and he himself takes notice of it in a psalm of grateful acknowledgment: “I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord: and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin^k.” To Hezekiah and Isaiah were similar assurances given^l. And our blessed Lord not only repeatedly vouchsafed this blessing to those who waited on him, but maintained his right to do so against those who questioned his power and authority to pardon sin^m.]

At present, also, is the same blessing still vouchsafed to his faithful servants—

[What can be meant by the Spirit of adoption that is given to the believing soulⁿ? What can be meant by the witness of the Spirit^o, the sealing of the Spirit^p, the earnest of the Spirit^q? What can be meant by “the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost^r,” if God never imparts to his people a sense of his pardoning love? I grant that if these divine sensations be not accompanied with a holy life, they are a mere illusion: but if the whole of our character and deportment be such as becomes the Gospel, then may we assure ourselves that these testimonies are from God, and that “our names are indeed written in the book of life^s.” We may “know that we have passed from death unto life^t.” Nor is this the privilege of the adult Christian only: for even the least in the family of Christ may possess it: as St. John says, “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven

^h Gen. iv. 4, 5.

ⁱ 2 Sam. xii. 13.

^k Ps. xxxii. 5.

^l Isai. vi. 7. and xxxviii. 17.

^m Matt. ix. 2—6. Luke vii. 48—50.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 15.

^o Rom. viii. 16.

^p Eph. i. 13.

^q Eph. i. 14.

^r Rom. v. 5.

^s Luke x. 20.

^t 1 John iii. 14.

you for the sake of Christ^u." And to the whole Ephesian Church it was proclaimed, "God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."]

But it is not merely as comforting the soul that I insist on this, but chiefly and principally,

III. As operating in the life—

A sense of God's pardoning love should operate on us *generally*—

[Nothing but this will ever call forth our energies fully in the service of our God. It is "the love of Christ that must constrain us:" and *that*, duly apprehended, will cause us to live altogether unto Him who died for us, and rose again^x — — —]

More *particularly* should it produce in us a forgiving temper against our offending brethren—

[A spirit of forbearance and forgiveness is insisted on by the inspired writers, as indispensable to the Christian character; insomuch, that a person who is not under its influence has no hope of obtaining mercy at the hands of God. The mercy which we ourselves have received for Christ's sake, is proposed in my text as a powerful *motive* for the exercise of a forgiving disposition on our part, and as a *pattern* which, in the exercise of it, we should resemble. The same important truth is taught us in the parable of the unforgiving servant; who, when forgiven by his master ten thousand talents, seized a fellow-servant by the throat, and cast him into prison for the trifling debt of one hundred pence. For such merciless conduct his lord was justly incensed against him; as he will be against all who know not how to imitate the goodness of their God^y. It is on this principle that our Lord requires us to "forgive an offending brother, not seven times in a day, but seventy times seven^z." For, if we call to remembrance our own offences, and consider for a moment how great and multiplied they have been, we shall see, that no injury which a fellow-creature can do to us can bear any proportion to the offences which we have committed against God: and, consequently, that there should be no disposition in us but to render to our fellow-creatures according to what we ourselves have received at the hands of God.]

^u 1 John ii. 12.

^x 2 Cor. v. 15.

^y Matt. xviii. 23—35. There was no proportion between the debts, the one being about three pounds, and the other nearly seven millions.

^z Matt. xviii. 21, 22.

APPLICATION—

1. Be sensible of your obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ—

[It is not for *your own* sake that God has forgiven you, but for his dear Son's sake. And if Christ had not interposed for you, to reconcile you unto God by his own death upon the cross, you would to all eternity have been in the condition of the fallen angels, who are receiving in hell the due recompence for their sins. Reflect, then, on your desert before God, and on the mercy you are receiving at his hands; and then direct your eyes to the Saviour, and give him the glory due unto his name. Of course, it is here supposed that you have deeply repented of your sins, and “fled for refuge to Christ, as to the hope set before you:” for, if you have not thus come to Christ, you are yet “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, and without any scriptural hope of salvation” — — — But if, indeed, you have believed in Christ, then should every faculty of your soul be called forth in grateful and continual praises for all that you now enjoy, and all that you hope for in a better world — — —]

2. Endeavour to requite them in the way that he himself has enjoined—

[Look, not to your conduct merely, but to the inmost dispositions of your souls. His love to you should be the model of your love to others. Let his image, then, be seen upon you. And, as men are known by the very form of the characters they write, so “be ye epistles of Christ, known and read of all men^a.” “Let the same mind be in you as was in him^b,” and, “as he has loved you, see that ye also love one another^c.”]

^a 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3.

^b Phil. ii. 5.

^c John xiii. 34.

MMCXIV.

CHRIST'S LOVE A PATTERN FOR OURS.

Eph. v. 2. *Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.*

TO restore us to the Divine image is one great end of all that the Lord Jesus Christ has done and suffered for us. There are indeed perfections in the Deity which are incommunicable to any creature;

but his moral perfections admit of imitation and resemblance: and therefore we are exhorted to “be followers, or imitators, of God, as dear children^a.” But in the person of our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jehovah is brought nearer to us, so that we may trace his very steps, and learn to follow him in every disposition of the mind, and every action of the life. Hence in the passage before us, whilst we are particularly informed of the manner in which he has displayed his love to man, we are exhorted to “walk in love, as he has loved us.”

In our further elucidation of these words, we shall be led to speak of the Lord Jesus Christ in a two-fold view;

I. As a sacrifice to God—

It was not merely as a martyr that Jesus died, but as a sacrifice for sin. This appears,

1. From all the sacrifices of the Mosaic law—

[For what end were these instituted, but to prefigure him? These beyond a doubt were offerings for sin, the victims dying in the place of the offerer, and making an atonement for him by their blood: and if the Lord Jesus Christ did not correspond with them in this particular, and actually fulfil what those prefigured, they were all instituted in vain, and were shadows without any substance at all.]

2. From the declarations of the prophets—

[The prophet thus plainly speaks of Christ as dying for the sins of men; “He made his soul an offering for sin:” “He bare the sins of many:” “On him were laid the iniquity of us all^b.” What is the import of these testimonies, if Christ did not offer himself a sacrifice for sin?]

3. From the testimony of John the Baptist—

[It was in reference to the lambs that were offered every morning and evening for the sins of all Israel, that the Baptist spake, when he pointed out the Lord Jesus as “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.” If Christ were not a sacrifice for sin, this testimony was not founded in truth.]

4. From the declarations of Christ himself—

^a ver. 1.

^b Isai. liii. 6, 10, 12.

[He constantly affirmed, that "he came to give his life a ransom for many:" that his blood should be shed for the remission of sins; and that by being "lifted up upon the cross, he would draw all men unto him."]

5. From the united testimony of all the Apostles—

[All with one voice represent him as redeeming us to God by his blood, and offering himself as "a propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world." In a word, the whole tenour of the sacred writings proves, that "he bare our sins in his own body on the tree," and "died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."]

But in all this he was further designed,

II. As an example to us—

In the circumstance before noticed, we cannot resemble him; for "no man can redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him." Nevertheless in the love which instigated him to this we may resemble him. Our love, like his, should be,

1. Disinterested—

[It is not possible for us to add any thing to him: we cannot make him more happy or more glorious by any thing that we can do: "our goodness extendeth not to him;" "nor can we by any means profit him:" yet did he in this astonishing manner display his love to us. Thus in the exercise of our love we should not consider whether the objects of it will ever be able to make us any suitable return: we should shew love in every possible way, without so much as desiring any return from man, or even desiring that our exercise of it should be known; yea, even though we knew that it would only be requited with evil. We should love our very enemies; and, "instead of being overcome of evil, should strive incessantly to overcome their evil with good."]

2. Generous—

[What unsearchable riches has he purchased even for his bitterest enemies? He would not that any one of them should fall short of the glory of heaven. True it is, that we cannot thus enrich the objects of our love: yet we should do all we can towards it, by providing for them not only the things needful for the body, but, above all, the things that may promote the welfare of the soul. Here the poor may be on a par with those who are able to give out of their abundance: for if they are constrained to say, "Silver and gold have I

none," they may add, "but such as I have, give I unto thee;" and then may proceed to speak to them of the Saviour, through whom they may obtain all the blessings of salvation. Thus, "though poor, we may make many rich."]

3. Self-denying—

[Our blessed Lord "emptied himself of all the glory of heaven," and endured all the wrath of an offended God; and became a curse himself, in order to deliver us from the curse which our iniquities had deserved. And shall we decline exercising our love, because it may be attended with some pain or difficulty on our part? No: we should not hesitate even to lay down life itself, if by so doing we may promote the eternal welfare of our brethren^c.]

4. Constant—

["Whom our Lord loved, he loved to the end." There were many occasions whereon his immediate disciples displeased him: but he did not therefore "withdraw his mercy from them, or shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure." There are occasions also whereon we shall be called to exercise forbearance and forgiveness one towards another; and we ought to meet those occasions with love proportioned to them. We should strive with all our might to "follow peace with all men," and to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."]

ADDRESS—

1. Be thankful to Christ for all the wonders of his love—

[Think how unworthy you were of all his love: for, it was "when you were yet enemies, that he died for you." Think too what must have been your state to all eternity, if He had not so "undertaken for you:" his sufferings under the hidings of his Father's face, and under the strokes of Divine justice, shew what miseries awaited you in hell for ever, if He had not become your substitute and surety to discharge your debt. O! never for a moment lose sight of the obligations you owe to him for that "love of his, which passeth knowledge."]

2. Present yourselves as living sacrifices to him—

[This *may* be done; and it is the very end for which such astonishing mercies have been vouchsafed to you^d. Consider all that you are, and all that you have, as his: and let it all be devoted henceforth to the glory of his name.]

3. Endeavour to resemble him more and more—

^c 1 John iii. 16.

^d Rom. xii. 1.

[Whatever attainments you may have made, you must still be aspiring after higher degrees of love^e. Look at him then, not only as the ground of your hopes, but as the pattern for your imitation. Trace him in all the labours of his love: trace him from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven: trace him in all that he either did or suffered: and study to resemble him in the whole of his spirit and deportment. In all his labours “God smelled a sweet savour;” even as he had done in those offerings and sacrifices by which Christ had been shadowed forth^f: and though your labours of love can never resemble his, as making an atonement for sin, they shall, like his, come up for a memorial before God, and be accepted as well-pleasing in his sight^g.]

^e 1 Thess. iv. 9, 10.

^f Gen. viii. 21. Lev. i. 9.

^g Heb. vi. 10. and xiii. 16.

MMCXV.

FATAL CONSEQUENCES OF INDULGED SIN.

Eph. v. 5—7. *This ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them.*

NEVER can we be wrong in bearing our testimony against sin. As for those who, from a zeal for the Gospel, pass over subjects of this kind *as legal*, we cannot but think them grievously mistaken. for St. Paul, whose love to the Gospel was so ardent, that “he counted all things but dung and dross for the knowledge of it,” was inferior to no man in inculcating the necessity of holiness, or in denouncing the judgments of God against indulged sin. The words before us amply illustrate this: for, specifying particular sins, which would surely prove fatal to all who lived in them, he made them the subject of a *faithful appeal*, and of a most *solemn warning* to the Church of God in all ages.

Were we to speak of this subject under distinct heads, those which we have just mentioned would afford an easy arrangement: but on such a subject as

this, I think that the mention of distinct heads would be an interruption to us, and weaken the impression which the text itself is calculated to convey.

We declare then to you, brethren, that sin indulged will destroy your souls—

[The Scriptures speak of sin under the twofold character, of the “filthiness of the flesh, and the filthiness of the spirit^a.” Both these kinds of sin are mentioned in my text: “fornication and uncleanness” belonging to “the flesh,” and “covetousness” having its seat rather in “the spirit.” Now these, whether more open and flagrant, or more secret and refined, are alike fatal to the soul, if they be harboured and indulged. They alike exclude us from heaven: for it is impossible that a person who lives in the commission of them should “have any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” — — —]

And “*this*,” if you know any thing of Christianity, “*you know*”—

[The whole voice of Scripture declares it. Even reason itself may be considered as bearing testimony to it: for what delight can a holy God take in an unholy being? or how can the Lord Jesus Christ, “who died to destroy the works of the devil, exalt to a participation of his kingdom one who is fulfilling the works of the devil? We may as well conceive that “Christ and Belial should have communion with each other,” as that a man who regards and retains iniquity in his heart should enter into the kingdom of heaven — — —]

Let nothing, therefore, weaken the impression of this upon your minds—

[There are those who will dispute against this. They will speak of “uncleanness,” especially if the marriage-bed be not invaded, as, at most, a venial fault, necessarily arising from the ardour of youth, and undeserving of any serious regard. And as to “covetousness,” there is no such thing existing in the world, if every person’s estimate of himself may be relied on. Men will, indeed, impute it to others; but no one acknowledges it in himself. Every one covers it with some specious name: ‘It is prudence, economy, diligence, a proper regard for one’s family; and surely there can be no blame attached to habits like these.’ But let it be remembered what “covetousness” is: it is a desiring of any thing for its own sake, that we may find our happiness in it, rather than in God; and place our dependence on it, rather than on God: and *that*

^a 2 Cor. vii. 1.

whether it be in a man of opulence, or in a person of low degree, is equally “idolatry,” and will infallibly exclude a man from the kingdom of God. As for all the pretexts that may be urged either for this or for uncleanness, they are but “vain words,” that will “deceive you,” to your eternal ruin. Look and see what fornication brought upon the whole nation of Israel^b: or what coveting did in the case of Achan; who, amongst two millions of people was singled out by lot^c: and be assured, that however secret your sin be, or however sanctioned by the habits of those around you, “the wrath of God will, sooner or later, come on all the children of disobedience” — — — Full well I know, how pleasing it is to be told that we have nothing to fear, and how ready we are to credit such unfounded assertions: but to what purpose will it be to “speak peace to ourselves, when God has said that there is no peace?” I warn you then, beloved, not to listen to any such delusive suggestions, by whomsoever they may be offered: but “let God be true, and every man a liar.”]

And let nothing under heaven induce you to comply with the solicitations of others, or to imitate their sins—

[Though you are united in a Christian society, and profess all the doctrines of Christianity, you still are liable to be seduced by the arguments and examples of those around you. But remember, that, if you are partakers with others in their sins, you shall be “partakers also with them in their plagues^d.” And it will be little consolation to you, in the eternal world, that you have partners in misery: nor will it be any excuse for you, that you have been deceived. God cautions you against deceit, whether it originate in yourselves or others. His word is plain: his warnings are solemn: and if you will not obey his voice, you must reap the fruits of your folly. Unite not, then, with any in a course of sin. Partake not with any, either in following their evil ways, or in giving your sanction to them. Your duty is, to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them^e.” If you profess to be children of light, then must you walk worthy of your holy profession, “shining, before all, as lights in the world.”]

If, however, you have been drawn aside to sin, then humble yourselves for it without delay, and turn unto your God in newness of life—

^b Numb. xxv. 1. with 1 Cor. x. 8.

^c Josh. vii. 10—26.

^d Rev. xviii. 4.

^e ver. 11.

[Blessed be God! your state is not hopeless, though you may have fallen into sin. For at Corinth there were some who had been guilty of the very transgressions here referred to, and yet had obtained mercy through Christ: "Such were some of you," says St. Paul; "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God^f." So, then, may ye be washed, and justified, and sanctified, if you turn unto God through Christ. The blood of Christ shall be sufficient for you, as it was for them; and the Spirit of Christ shall operate as effectually in you as in them. "Only acknowledge your transgressions," and "flee for refuge to the hope that is set before you;" so shall you find mercy of the Lord, and "your iniquity shall not be your ruin^g."]]

^f 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

^g Ezek. xviii. 30.

MMCXVI.

A CONSISTENT WALK ENJOINED.

Eph. v. 8. *Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.*

MANY imagine, that when they have believed in Christ, the work in them is complete: and, if they were then to die, it is true that they would be complete; because it is said of all believers, "Ye are complete in Christ, who is the Head of all principality and power." But no man in this world is so complete, but that he still needs to be urged forward, by warnings and exhortations, and promises and examples. This is clearly manifest from all the apostolic writings, in which the saints are cautioned against every species of sin, and stimulated to every species of duty. The latter half of this epistle is altogether addressed to believers, in this precise point of view, exhorting them to "walk worthy the vocation wherewith they are called^a." The truth is, that saints are yet only as "brands plucked out of the burning:" they still bear the marks of the fire strong upon them, and are still in danger of being consumed by the influence of fiery temptations, if God in his mercy do

^a Eph. iv. 1.

not preserve them. Their safety is in watchfulness and prayer: in watchfulness, that they give not occasion to Satan to inflame their souls with evil: and in prayer, that, as soon as any spark shall light upon them, it may be extinguished. To all, without exception, of whom it may be said, “Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord,” the exhortation that is added must be addressed; “Walk as children of light.”

In discoursing on these words, we shall be led to shew,

1. The change which all true Christians have experienced—

“They once were darkness”—

[The term, “darkness,” in Scripture language, imports ignorance, sin, and misery: and therefore most fitly expresses the state of unconverted men. The mind of the natural man is blind to the things of God: they are spiritual, and he cannot comprehend them for want of a spiritual discernment^b. He knows not the spirituality of God’s law, or the total alienation of his heart from God. He has no just views of the Divine perfections, no adequate sense of his need of a Redeemer; no true perception of the beauty of holiness, or of the excellency of a life entirely devoted unto God. To himself he lives, and not to God: he is a law unto himself, and does nothing but with a view to the gratification of his own feelings. Pleasure, interest, and honour, are the gods whom he serves: and beyond the things of time and sense he has no object of ambition or pursuit. In this state he may find what the world calls happiness; but to real happiness he is a stranger. Whatever satisfaction he feels, it is in a forgetfulness of eternal things that he feels it, and not in the contemplation of them. The thought of death and judgment is appalling to him; and is sufficient to make him, like Belshazzar, tremble in the midst of all his mirth; so that “his countenance shall change, and his knees smite one against the other^c.” It is the heart-searching God who says, that there is “no real peace to such persons^d,” but that “destruction and misery are in their ways^e.”

Nor let it be thought that this is the character of some only whose wickedness has been of a more flagrant nature: for

^b 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^d Isai. lvii. 20, 21.

^c Dan. v. 6.

^e Rom. iii. 16, 17.

St. Paul assures us, that it was once his own state, no less than that of others^f — — — and therefore we may be sure that it is common to all. Indeed a very little knowledge of mankind will convince us, that “the whole world lieth in wickedness^g,” and unconverted men are not only dark, but “darkness” itself, even darkness visible.]

But “they are now light in the Lord” —

[In their conversion they are “turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” Their views of self, of sin, of God, of Christ, of every thing around them, are changed — — — In consequence of “the eyes of their understanding being enlightened,” they come forth from the broad road in which they have been walking, and begin to tread the narrow, and less frequented paths, of holiness and life. Their whole labour now is to “put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” — — — Now they are no longer under bondage to the fear of death, or bowed down with the apprehensions of God’s eternal wrath: they see that he is reconciled towards them in the Son of his love; and with “a spirit of adoption they come before him, crying, Abba, Father.” In a word, they now enjoy peace in their souls, even that “peace of God which passeth all understanding” — — —

All this they have “in the Lord,” that is, by virtue of union with him, and by grace derived from him. Being now members of Christ’s mystical body, they possess all that is in him their living Head, according to the measure of the grace they have received from him. “With Christ is the fountain of life; and in his light they see light.”]

Whilst we contemplate this blessed change, we must not overlook,

II. The obligations it entails upon them—

Consistency is required of all: of course, if we have been made “light in the Lord,” it becomes us to “walk as children of light.” By this expression we are taught,

1. What line we are to pursue—

[The commandment of the Lord is a lamp, and his “law is light^h:” and by his law are we to direct our steps. That Holy Spirit who has opened our eyes, and renewed our hearts, marks out for us our path, in direct opposition to that which

^f Eph. ii. 3. Tit. iii. 3.

^g 1 John v. 19.

^h Prov. vi. 23.

the unconverted world pursue; as the Apostle tells us in the words following our text: "The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." Whilst the ungodly indulge in all the fore-mentioned iniquities, our conduct is to be the very reverse of theirs. In opposition to all unholy tempersⁱ, we are to abound in every thing that is "lovely and of good report" — — — In opposition to all that may interfere with the welfare of others^k, we are to do in all things precisely as, in a change of circumstances, we should think it right for our neighbour to do unto us — — — And in the whole of our deportment towards both God and man, there should be the most inviolable "truth," even a perfect integrity of mind, a spirit that is without guile — — — Perhaps we may get somewhat of an idea of our duty from what we behold amongst the heavenly bodies. The stars are all irradiated by the sun; and in respect of that great luminary, may be called children of light. These, according to their capacity, reflect the brightness of the sun, and impart to others the light they have received. So it should be with us: we should make our light to shine before men, that so those who behold us may know how to walk, at the same time that they are constrained to glorify that Sun of Righteousness whose beams we reflect. This is the idea inculcated by the Apostle himself, who tells us, that we must "shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life^l," and "proving" in our own persons "what is acceptable unto the Lord^m."]

But there is yet another idea, and a very important one, suggested in this expression, "children of light." It is the property of light to make things manifest; and consequently, we are to bear our testimony against all the deeds of darkness, not only "having no fellowship with them, (for "what fellowship can light have with darknessⁿ?"") but reproving them^o," and bearing our testimony for God against all who commit them.

Such then must our conduct be, holy and exemplary, decided and firm.]

2. In what spirit we should walk in it—

["Children of disobedience" are such as, from the propensity of their nature, live in wilful and habitual disobedience to God's commands. So "children of light," from the impulse of the Holy Spirit, walk cheerfully and habitually in the ways of God. They are not compelled, like slaves, to serve him against their will; but, like dear children, they love their Father's will, and find his ways to be ways of pleasantness and

ⁱ Eph. iv. 31.

^m ver. 10.

^k ver. 3.

ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 14.

^l Phil. ii. 15, 16.

^o ver. 11, 13.

peace. Nor is it merely on some particular occasions that they obey his voice: they do it constantly, and without reserve: "they delight to do his will;" and "run the way of his commandments with enlarged hearts." This characterizes the angels around the throne: and it distinguishes also the children of the living God: they "do his will, hearkening to the voice of his word^p," and making every succeeding act a prelude to yet further services.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have never yet experienced this change—

[Be assured, it must be experienced before you can ever enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whether your lives have been more or less polluted with outward sin, you have all equally lived to yourselves, instead of unto God: and your consciences bear testimony against you, that to secure an interest in Christ, and to grow up into his image, and to live for his glory, have not been the great objects of your ambition, nor has your departure from this path been any source of humiliation to your souls. What is darkness, if this be not? It is, in fact, a living "without God in the world:" and this path, if persisted in, will bring you to "the blackness of darkness for ever." But I thank God, there is no room for despondency. The Lord Jesus Christ has "come a light into the world, that whoso followeth him should not walk in darkness, but have the light of life^q." For this very end was he given, that "he should be a light to the Gentiles, and say to the prisoners, Go forth; and to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves^r." Despair not therefore; but entreat, that, as the Sun of Righteousness, he would "arise upon you with healing in his wings." And hear, for your encouragement, his gracious promise: "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight: these things will I do unto them, and not forsake them^s." But delay not to seek these blessings at his hands. Seek them "before he cause your darkness to increase, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and, while ye are looking for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness^t." To this effect our Saviour himself charges you: "Yet a little while is the light with you: walk whilst ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light^u."]

^p Ps. ciii. 20.

^q John viii. 12.

^r Isai. xlix. 6, 9.

^s Isai. xlii. 16.

^t Jer. xiii. 16.

^u John xii. 35, 36.

2. Those who have an evidence in themselves that it has been wrought in them—

[However the world may despise it as enthusiasm, there are many who have “passed from death unto life,” and “been brought out of darkness into marvellous light.” O rejoice in the Lord, who hath done such great things for you! And now set yourselves to walk worthy of this high calling. Think what manner of persons ye ought to be, and what a holy heavenly conversation becomes you. Guard against every degree of return to your former state. Guard against those who would draw you back, or impede your progress in the heavenly life. It is your privilege “to walk in the light, as God is in the light^x,” and to have your path like “the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day^y.” And, whilst this is really the desire and labour of your souls, fear not: your God will be with you, “causing your light to rise in obscurity, and your darkness to be as the noon-day.” Then may you look forward with confidence to that day, when your present light, like that of a taper, shall be eclipsed by the infinitely brighter splendour of the sun; even to that day, when “the sun shall be no more your light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto you; but the Lord shall be unto you an everlasting light, and your God your glory^z.”]

^x 1 John i. 6, 7.

^y Prov. iv. 18.

^z Isai. lx. 19, 20.

MMCXVII.

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY.

Eph. v. 9. *The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.*

THERE is in the minds of many a prejudice against the writings of St. Paul, as though they contained nothing but dissertations about predestination and election, and were calculated rather to drive people to despondence than to improve their morals. But there are no writings in the whole sacred volume more practical than his. True it is, that he unfolds the whole mystery of godliness more fully and more deeply than others: and he seems to have been raised up of God for that very end, that the theory of religion might be more distinctly known: but, in

all his epistles, he has an especial respect to the interests of morality; the standard of which he elevates to an extent unknown before, and for the practice of which he adduces motives which never till that time were duly appreciated. In no one of his epistles does he maintain more strongly those doctrines which are thought so objectionable, than in this: yet is one half of the epistle occupied with exhortations to holiness, in all its different bearings and relations.

In the words before us we have, what I may call, a compendium, or summary, of Christian morals.

And, that we may know what *practical Christianity* really is, I will,

I. Mark it in its offices—

Sanctification, both in heart and life, is the great end of the Gospel, and a most essential part of that redemption which is there revealed to us. It is here set forth as including,

1. Goodness—

[Goodness is the one all-comprehensive character of the Deity. It shines forth in all his works: it meets us wherever we turn our eyes: “The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord^a.” The effect of the Gospel is, to transform us into his image: and this it does; creating it in *our hearts*, and calling it forth in *our lives*. Under the influence of this divine principle, we shall seek to promote the happiness of all around us. Whatever is amiable, and lovely, and of good report, in the spirit and temper of the mind, we shall cultivate it to the uttermost, and exercise it on all occasions. There will be no trouble which we shall not labour to alleviate; no want which we shall not endeavour to supply. To “be good, and do good,” even like God himself^b, will be the summit of our ambition, and the very end of our lives.]

2. Righteousness—

[Whilst goodness is spontaneous, and acts irrespective of any particular claim which men may have upon us, “righteousness” has respect to the obligations which we lie under to “render unto all their dues.” This, also, the Gospel forms within us; stirring us up, both in word and deed, to act

^a Ps. xxxiii. 5.

^b Ps. cxix. 68.

towards others as we, in a change of circumstances, should think it right for them to do unto us. There is in the heart of man a *selfishness*, which disposes him to see every thing with partial eyes; magnifying his own rights, and overlooking the rights of others. This disposition the Gospel will subdue and mortify; and, in its place, it will establish a principle of universal equity, that will weigh the claims of others with exactness, and prompt us, under all circumstances, rather to “suffer wrong than to do wrong^c.”]

3. Truth—

[This is the perfection of Christian morals, or the bond which keeps all the other graces in their place^d. Where the Gospel has had its perfect work, there will be “a spirit that is without guile^e.” The Christian is a *pellucid* character: he appears as he is, and is what he appears.

You will perceive, that, in immediate connexion with our text, the Apostle says, “Walk as children of the light: *for* the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.” Now, here the three graces mentioned in the text are represented as constituting *light*, or, at least, as comprehending all that is contained in that image. Now, of all things in the whole creation, light is the most pure (for it is incapable of defilement); the most innocent (for it injures nothing, which has not, through its own weakness, an aversion to its rays); and the most beneficial (for there is not a thing in the universe, possessed of animal or vegetable life, which is not nourished and refreshed by it). Invert the order of these words, and you behold how light beams forth in our text; embodying all the purity of truth, the innocence of righteousness, and the beneficence of active goodness.]

But, to understand practical Christianity aright, we must,

II. Trace it to its source—

It springs not from nature’s stock: the natural man cannot attain unto it. It is “the fruit of the Spirit,” even of that very Spirit who raised up our Lord Jesus Christ himself from the dead^f.

1. It is the Spirit who alone infuses life into us—

[We are by nature “dead in trespasses and sins:” and it is the Spirit who quickens us, that we may live unto our

^c 1 Cor. vi. 7, 8.

^e John i. 47.

^d Eph. vi. 14.

^f Eph. i. 19, 20.

God^g. True indeed, having been “baptized into Christ,” we are become, by profession, branches of the living vine. But then we are only as dead and withered branches, that can produce no fruit; and will shortly be broken off, and cast into the fire^h. It is the Spirit alone who engrafts us into Christ, as living branches; and causes us to receive from Christ that divine energy, whereby we are enabled to bring forth fruit to his glory. “Christ came that we might have life, and might have it more abundantlyⁱ,” but it is by the operation of his Spirit that we receive it; and by the mighty working of that Spirit in our souls that we display its energies^k.]

2. It is the Spirit who suggests to our minds those motives which alone can stimulate us to exertion—

[He “reveals the Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts^l.” “He glorifies Christ within us; taking of the things that are his, and shewing them unto us^m.” “He sheds abroad in our hearts that love of Christⁿ,” which alone can constrain us to devote ourselves unreservedly to him^o. Till we receive this impulse, we are satisfied with formal services, and a partial obedience: but, when we are enabled thus “to comprehend somewhat of the unbounded love of Christ, we can rest in nothing, till we are filled with all the fulness of God^p.”]

3. It is the Spirit who assists us in all our endeavours—

[Whatever we may have attained, we still have no sufficiency in ourselves. We shall indeed put our hands to the work: but we shall accomplish nothing, till the Holy Spirit “strengthens us with might in our inward man^q,” and, taking hold, as it were, of one end of our burthen, to bear it with us, “helpeth our infirmities,” and lends us his own effectual aid^r. Hence these graces are properly called “the fruit of the Spirit;” since they cannot be produced without him, and are invariably the result of his agency in our souls. It is he who, as our Church well expresses it, “worketh in us, that we may have a good will; and worketh with us when we have that good will^s.”]

Yet, as it must be confessed that there is a semblance of this holiness found in those who have not the Holy Spirit, it will be proper to,

III. Distinguish it from all counterfeits—

^g Eph. ii. 1.

^k Col. i. 29.

ⁿ Rom. v. 5.

^q Col. i. 11.

^h John xv. 2, 6.

^l Gal. i. 15, 16.

^o 2 Cor. v. 14.

^r Rom. viii. 26.

ⁱ John x. 10.

^m John xvi. 14.

^p Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^s Tenth Article.

It must be confessed, that in many natural men there are found *virtues* very nearly resembling the *graces* before spoken of. There is in many a very diffusive *benevolence*, a strict regard to *equity*, and a high sense of *integrity*: and you will reasonably ask, How are these to be distinguished from those things which we have described as “the fruit of the Spirit?” I answer: To us, who can only see the outward act, it may frequently be difficult to discern the difference between them; but to God, who sees the heart, they are as different from each other as light from darkness. For of these counterfeits I must say,

1. They *proceed from man*, and from man alone—

[Man needs no particular communication of the Spirit to enable him to perform them. The light of reason points out those virtues as commendable; and the strength of a man's own resolution is sufficient for the performance of them. Hence the persons of whom we speak never pray to God for his Spirit, nor feel any desire after supernatural aid. But the graces mentioned in our text are “the fruits of the Spirit;” and never were, nor ever can be, produced, but by his Almighty agency.]

2. They *have respect to man*, and to man alone—

[The worldling, however virtuous, acts not to God, nor has any distinct desire to fulfil the will of God. He considers, that, as a member of society, he has duties to perform; and therefore he performs them, *as far as he sees occasion for them, in the relation in which he stands*. He has no other view of them than what an intelligent heathen might have. But the Christian aims at “ALL goodness, righteousness, and truth.” He views these duties in reference to the eternal, as well as the temporal, interests of men. He views them as the Lord Jesus Christ did; and makes the outward discharge of them subservient to higher and nobler ends. As a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, he has to advance his interests in the salvation of men: and he will account it a small matter to exercise kindness to men in a temporal view, if he may not also, according to his ability, promote their spiritual and eternal welfare.]

3. They *are done for man*, and for man alone—

[A worldling seeks only to please man and to establish a good character amongst his fellow-creatures. If he attain this object, he is satisfied. To stand high in his own esteem, and

in the esteem of others, is the height of his ambition. But the Christian desires that God, and God only, may be glorified. He seeks not applause from man: he cherishes no fond conceits of his own superior excellence: much less does he go about to establish a righteousness of his own, wherein to stand before God. Instead of admiring himself for his own attainments, he will trace them all to their proper source, and give God the glory of them: yea, the more he is enabled to do for God, the more he feels himself indebted to God. He dares not "to sacrifice to his own net, or to burn incense to his own drag;" but accounts himself, after all, an unprofitable servant; and says, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise."

Now, whether we can discern the difference, or not, in others, we may easily detect it in ourselves; and, consequently, may easily discern "whose we are, and whom we serve." And I cannot but recommend it to all, to be jealous over themselves, lest they mistake the *virtues* of the *flesh* for the *graces* of the *Spirit*; and lest, "having a name to live, they prove really dead^t."

For an improvement of this subject, OBSERVE,

1. How excellent a religion is ours!

[They form a very erroneous idea of Christianity, who view it as a system of doctrines merely, irrespective of the effects to be produced by them. I will readily grant, that mysteries, however grand, are of little value, if they operate no sanctifying change within us. But let any person contemplate the change wrought by the Spirit on the heart and life of a believer; let him see poor selfish creatures transformed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus, and walking in the world as he walked; let him go into the world, the family, the closet, and see the dispositions and habits of the true Christian; will any one obtain even a glance of this, and not admire the religion from whence it flows? I charge you, brethren, rest not in partial views of Christianity: satisfy not yourselves with looking at it as a system of mysterious doctrines, propounded for speculation only. No; view it in all its practical efficiency; and then you will acknowledge that it is worthy of all possible honour, respect, and love.]

2. How easily may we ascertain our state before God!

[We may surely, without any great difficulty, find what our tempers and dispositions are; and whether we are in the daily habit of imploring help from God for the improvement

^t Rev. iii. 1.

of them. There is a great difference in the natural constitutions of men; so that we cannot absolutely say, that a person, comparatively moral, is therefore a spiritual man. This must be learned rather from the conflicts he maintains, and the victories he achieves, under the influence of the Holy Spirit. And, at all events, we may be sure, that where there is no delight in doing good to the souls of men; where, in our conduct towards others, there is any wilful deviation from the line which we should think right to be observed towards us; and where there is any want of simplicity and godly sincerity in our motives and principles; whatever we may imagine, we are not Christians indeed. I pray you to take this touchstone, whereby to try yourselves^u; and beg of God also to search and try you, that there may be nothing found at last to disappoint your hopes^x.]

3. How delightful is the path assigned us!

[I say not that there are no seasons for humiliation: for no doubt there are, even for the best of men. But, for the daily course of your lives, you need only look to my text. See the Christian in his daily walk: "goodness, righteousness, and truth," are embodied in him; and, like the combined action of the solar rays, he diffuses light and happiness around him. This is to "walk in the light, as God is in the light:" this is to honour God: this is to adorn the Gospel: this is to fulfil the ends for which Christ himself came into the world: this is to possess a meetness for the heavenly inheritance. Let those who know not what religion is, condemn it, if they will: but sure I am, that, if viewed aright, "its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace."]

^u 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^x Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

MMCXVIII.

AN EXHORTATION TO CARELESS SINNERS.

Eph. v. 14. *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.*

THERE is a harmony in the Scriptures which many overlook and destroy: detached passages are often wrested to establish a favourite system^a. But

^a Calls to duty are supposed to imply the sufficiency of man to do the will of God; while the confessions or petitions of the saints, and the promises of Divine aid given to them, are brought to justify a negligence in the use of means.

the various truths of God should be viewed as they stand connected with each other; there would then be diversity indeed, but no contrariety between them^b. This observation will throw light, as on many other parts of Scripture, so on that before us in particular; in which we have,

I. A command—

The Scripture abounds with useful and instructive metaphors. Our state is here represented under the images of sleep and death.

Sleep implies a state of *inactivity* and *security*—

[Men are busily employed about their worldly concerns; but a lamentable supineness prevails with respect to spiritual things. The generality do not apprehend their souls to be in any danger: death, judgment, heaven, and hell, do not seem worthy their notice: God's threatenings against them are denounced without effect: they are like Jonah, sleeping in the midst of a storm: hence they are described as “at ease from their youth^c.” To the same effect is the testimony of Him who searcheth the heart^d—]

Death includes the ideas of *impotence* and *corruption*—

[An inanimate body cannot perform any of the functions of life: it has within itself the seeds and principles of corruption. The soul also, till quickened from the dead, is in a state of impotence: it is incapable of spiritual action or discernment^e; its powers and faculties are altogether vitiated^f; whatever is loathsome and offensive to God proceeds from it^g. So true is that humiliating declaration^h—!]

Yet, notwithstanding this state appears so desperate, we must address, to every one that is under it, the command, “Awake,” &c.

[Your inactivity and security involve you in the deepest guilt: your corruption of heart and life provokes the majesty of God: nor is your impotence any excuse for your disobedience. It is your love of sin that disables you for duty: nor

^b God gives a *command*, Ezek. xviii. 31. David, knowing his duty, and feeling his inability to perform it, had long before presented this to God in the form of a *petition*, Ps. li. 10. And God, to encourage such applications to him, *promises* to work in us that which he requires of us, Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

^c Jer. xlviii. 11. ^d Ps. x. 4, 5. ^e John xv. 5. 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^f Rom. vii. 18. ^g Mark vii. 21, 22. ^h Job xv. 14—16.

is God deprived of his right to command, because you have lost your power to obey. Let every one then strive to comply with his heavenly call. They who exert their feeble powers may expect divine assistanceⁱ.]

To convince us that none shall fail who use the appointed means, God enforces his command with,

II. A promise—

Sleep and death are states of intellectual *darkness*. Hence *light* is promised to those who obey the Divine mandate. *Light* in Scripture imports knowledge^k, holiness^l, comfort^m, and gloryⁿ; and all these blessings shall they receive from Christ, the fountain of light^o.

Knowledge—

[Spiritual knowledge every natural man stands in need of: nor is it attainable by the teaching of men, or the efforts of genius^p: we can receive it from none but Christ^q. Hence Christ invites us to come to him for it^r: nor shall an application to him ever fail of success^s.]

Holiness—

[A despair of attaining this deters many from seeking it. They think their inveterate habits cannot be rooted out^t; but Christ is our “sanctification” as well as our wisdom^u. His very name encourages us to expect deliverance from him^x, and he will fulfil the promises which he has made to this effect^y.]

Comfort—

[A sense of guilt shall yield to holy joy^z: deplored weakness shall be succeeded by divine energy^a. Our delight in him shall be spiritual and exalted^b: it shall far transcend all earthly pleasures^c.]

Glory—

ⁱ See Matt. xii. 10, 13. The man with the withered hand was unable to stretch it forth; but in attempting to obey, he was endued with strength.

^k Isai. viii. 20.

^l 1 John i. 7.

^m Ps. xcvi. 11.

ⁿ Col. i. 12.

^o Mal. iv. 2. John i. 9.

^p Matt. xi. 25.

^q Matt. xi. 27.

^r Matt. xi. 29.

^s Ps. xxv. 9. Prov. ii. 3—6.

^t Jer. ii. 25.

^u 1 Cor. i. 30.

^x Matt. i. 21.

^y Mic. vii. 19. Isai. i. 25.

^z Isai. xxix. 19. and lxi. 3.

^a Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.

^b Isai. li. 11. and lviii. 11.

^c Ps. lxxxiv. 10. and iv. 6, 7.

[Our Lord will not confine his blessings to this world^d. He will raise his people to thrones of glory^e: he will cause them to participate his own inheritance^f: he will be the ground and object of their joy for ever^g.]

APPLICATION—

[What greater encouragement can any one desire? What richer promises can any one conceive? How suited are they to our necessities! Let every one consider the command as addressed to himself; “Awake, *thou*,” let all our powers and faculties be called forth to action. In exerting ourselves let us expect the promised aid. Thus shall we be eternal monuments of Christ’s power and grace.]

^d Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

^e Rev. iii. 21.

^f Rom. viii. 17.

^g Isai. lx. 19, 20.

MMCXIX.

REDEEMING THE TIME.

Eph. v. 15, 16. *See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

WHILE the Christian has so many corruptions within, and temptations without, he needs to be continually urged to vigilance and activity in the concerns of his soul. It was to the saints at Ephesus, even to the most eminent amongst them, that St. Paul addressed the exhortation before us: in which we may notice,

I. The duty of maintaining a circumspect walk—

We are evidently referred in the text to what had been spoken in the preceding context: from whence we are to gather the precise ideas which the Apostle comprehended in the terms, “Walk circumspectly.”

We should walk,

1. As persons who enjoy the light—

[Those who walk in the dark, know not how to order their steps^a: but they who walk in the noon-day, can see how and where to place their feet with accuracy and exactness^b. Now we have the light of God’s word^c; and should therefore

^a John xii. 35.

^b This is the more proper meaning of ἀκριβῶς.

^c ver. 8, 13, 14.

carefully avoid setting our foot in a place where we are liable to slip, or contract defilement.]

2. As persons that are afraid of erring—

[We are ever in danger of being led astray by the example of those around us. But we should “call no man master;” we should not follow St. Paul himself, any further than he followed Christ. If any should presume to vindicate what is contrary to the word of God, we should “take care not to be deceived” by their specious reasonings; and instead of being “partakers with them,” we should “avoid all fellowship with their unfruitful works;” yea, instead of conforming to them, we should “reprove them^d.”]

3. As persons that are anxious to please their God—

[Neither the opinions of others, nor selfish interests, are to regulate our conduct. We have but one inquiry to make, “What will please my God?” That view, that desire, that purpose, must be the spring of our actions, whether in public or in private^e. With a view to approve ourselves to him, we should as carefully inspect our motives and principles, our dispositions and frames, as if we saw him immediately present, and observed his eye fixed upon our hearts.]

From this general view of the subject, we descend to notice,

II. An important instance, wherein, more especially, circumspection should be mentioned—

There is nothing wherein circumspection is more needful, than in the improvement of our time—

[It is lamentable to think how much time is lost for want of a due solicitude to “redeem” it. Even in relation to temporal concerns, there are very few who are good economists of their time. But, in reference to their eternal interests, men let ten thousand opportunities pass them unheeded, and unimproved. Many have passed through half their lives, and not yet begun to seek the salvation of their souls. And of those who have not been altogether so careless, how many are there whose spiritual interests are at a very low ebb! They have not sufficiently watched the lapse of time, or been duly impressed with a sense of its value: and hence, “when for the time they ought to be qualified for teachers, they still need to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God^f.”]

We should therefore set ourselves instantly to “redeem the time”—

^d ver. 6, 7, 11.

^e ver. 10, 17.

^f Heb. v. 12.

[We should consider what it is that has robbed us of our precious hours, and guard particularly against it. Has *pleasure* allured us by its charms? We should renounce its gratifications, as far as they interfere with our spiritual welfare. Has *business* too much occupied our time? We should apportion to it what is necessary in our respective situations; but not suffer it to supersede our religious exercises. And, if the duties of our calling are such as to leave but a contracted space for reading and prayer, we should be the more earnest in consecrating the whole of the Sabbath to the service of our God. *Visiting and company* are found in general to be among the chief destroyers of our time: against these we should resolutely set ourselves; that, if we cannot recover what is passed, we may at least prevent the depredations which we are but too likely to experience in future. From *sleep* too we should redeem all that has been allotted to mere indulgence, and all that nature does not require for the renovation of her strength. Our whole time is little enough for the concerns of our souls; and therefore we should suffer as little of it as possible to run to waste, or to pass off in unproductive channels.]

To enforce the observance of this circumspection, the Apostle suggests,

III. Motives and inducements to maintain it—

He recommends it,

1. As a proof of wisdom—

[No greater folly can be conceived than for persons to be regardless of their eternal interests, and to trifle away that time which they ought to be employing in the concerns of their souls. It is true, that a circumspect walk, and a due improvement of time, are often called preciseness or enthusiasm: but let those who know not the value of the soul, deride these things: still, in the judgment of every discerning person, to walk with the greatest possible care and exactness, is to “walk, not as fools, but as wise:” for “the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding.”]

2. As a mean of safety—

[“The days” of the Apostles were “evil,” on account of the persecutions that raged: for every person felt that all his comforts might be speedily withdrawn, and that he might soon fall a sacrifice to his profession. This therefore was urged as

a reason for vigilance and circumspection: for if they might so quickly be called to give up their account to God, it became them to be ever on their guard, and ever ready. Our lot, through the tender mercy of our God, is cast on happier days: we are not exposed to the fury of persecutors: the utmost that we suffer, is, for the most part, a little contempt, and the loss of some temporal interests. Still however our “days” may justly be called “evil,” because of the general prevalence of infidelity and profaneness^h. We are as liable to be ensnared by evil examples, as those at Ephesus were to be turned aside by the fear of man. “Iniquity abounds; and therefore there is danger lest the love of many should wax cold.” If then we would not be drawn into the vortex of corruption, we should keep at a distance from it; and if we would stand in the day of trial, we should improve each passing hour in preparation for it.]

^h If there be war, famine, pestilence, or any other public calamity, it might be mentioned here.

MMCXX.

THE BELIEVER FILLED WITH THE HOLY GHOST.

Eph. v. 18—20. *Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ^a.*

THAT Christianity has raised the tone of morals in the world, will appear from the admonitions which the Apostles judged it necessary to give to the Churches in their day. It would appear almost superfluous, at this time, to expatiate upon the evil of fornication, in a letter addressed to true believers; or to guard them against yielding to intoxication; there being, in the minds of all, a consciousness of the inconsistency of such evils with the Christian profession. But the Corinthians had, in their unconverted

^a If this were the subject of a Sermon at a *Feast* (many *Country Feasts* begin on the Sabbath), it would be proper to include in the text the whole of the eighteenth verse; and to prosecute, at some length, the contrast between the employment of true Christians, and that of nominal Christians, on such occasions.

state, been proverbially dissolute; and the Ephesians, even in their religious rites on some occasions, had addicted themselves to intemperance: and both the one and the other brought with them into the Church their former sentiments and habits, against which they needed the most explicit warnings^b.

On the other hand, the standard of Christian privilege and attainment is sadly lowered in the present day; so that an exhortation to be filled with the Spirit, and to be living under the continual influence of the Spirit, seems to breathe nothing but enthusiasm. But, being well assured that Christian duties and privileges are precisely the same now as they were in the Apostle's days, I proceed to set before you,

I. The exalted privilege of believers—

The Spirit of God will dwell in the heart of every true Christian—

[As the Church at large, so every individual in it, is “the temple of God^c,” and “the habitation of God through the Spirit^d.” Our blessed Lord promised to send down the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, to abide within his people^e, to guide them into all truth^f, to support them under their respective trials^g, and to “sanctify them throughout, in body, soul, and spirit^h.” We are not, indeed, to expect at this time his miraculous operations: but his spiritual influences are continued to his Church; and shall be, even to the end of the worldⁱ: and to experience them, is the undoubted privilege of all true believers^k. Indeed, without them, we can never mortify sin^l, nor ever fulfil the will of God^m: and, if we experience them not, we are not true Christians: for it is expressly said, “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of hisⁿ.”]

Nor need there be any limit to our expectations of his gracious influences—

[It is our privilege to “*be filled* with the Spirit,” every one of us according to our respective capacities; and to have

^b 1 Cor. vi. 13—18. with the words before the text.

^c 1 Cor. vi. 19.

^d Eph. ii. 22.

^e John xiv. 16, 17.

^f John xvi. 13.

^g Eph. iii. 16.

^h 1 Thess. v. 23.

ⁱ Matt. xxviii. 20.

^k Acts ii. 38, 39.

^l Rom. viii. 13.

^m John xv. 5.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 9.

all our faculties and powers subjected to his controul. By him our understandings may be enlightened; so that we shall view every thing, in a measure, as God himself views it. By him, too, our will may be regulated; so that it shall be conformed to the mind and will of God. By him, also, our affections may be so inflamed, that the whole soul, as it were, shall be melted, and cast into the very mould of the Gospel.

In relation to this matter we need fear no excess. In the use of strong drink we may easily exceed; and excess will lead to the most pernicious consequences. By intoxication, we may be unfitted for the common offices of life; yea, and be precipitated into the commission of the foulest sins. But the more we have of the Holy Spirit, the more will sobriety and self-government characterize our whole conduct. We need, indeed, to guard against *delusions* respecting this matter: for there are many in the world who speak of dreams, and visions, and internal suggestions, and numberless other conceits, whereby they deceive both themselves and others. But on these no confidence whatever can be placed: they are, for the most part, the fruits of a heated imagination, and are as likely to come from Satan as from God. I do not mean to say that God *may* not reveal himself to persons in these ways; for what he *has done* in times past, he *may do again*: but I say, that whatever is not founded upon the word of God, and leads not to a holy and consistent life, is a mere delusion. Whatever betrays men into extravagances of any kind, is not of God: for “the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets^o,” and it becomes you to be on your guard against every thing which, in the mode of its access to your mind, is suspicious, or in its operation upon your mind is disorderly. I say again, therefore, that against *delusion* you *must* guard: but from *excess* in what is really from God, you are in no danger: for the more you are filled with the Spirit of Christ, the more you will resemble Christ in the whole of his character and deportment.]

Suited to this exalted privilege of believers, will be,

II. Their delightful employment—

Here you see how they are to act,

1. In their intercourse with each other—

[In the parallel passage in the Epistle to the Colossians, the Apostle’s meaning is somewhat more clearly expressed: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and *admonishing one another* in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the

Lord^p.” We should have a happy and peaceful frame of mind, whether alone or in company; and should be expressing our joy in songs of praise. Not that we should resemble those, whose spirits, being raised with wine, entertain themselves, and each other, with *vocal* and *carnal* songs: no; we should “make melody in our *hearts* to the *Lord*,” and have all our joys an emblem, an antepast, of heaven. Such expressions of earthly happiness we observe without any mixture of disapprobation or surprise: they are the natural effusions of a happy and buoyant spirit. How much more, then, should they be put forth in spiritual exercises, to the honour of our God, whose service is perfect freedom!]

2. In their more immediate intercourse with God—

[Every thing should be viewed by them as proceeding from a God of love: not even chastisement itself should be regarded as a token of his wrath, but rather as a mark of paternal tenderness, whereby he both intimates our relation to him, and seeks to establish and confirm it. Nothing, however penal in its aspect, should be viewed in any other light. We should taste his love in every thing, and “give him thanks always for all things.” And this we should do “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ:” for, as all God’s blessings come to us through him, so all our thanksgivings for them should return to God through him also. It is this which makes them acceptable to God the Father. If these were offered in our own name, they would never enter into the ears of the Lord of Hosts: but, being presented in the name of Jesus, they come up with acceptance before him, and are sure to return in blessings on our own souls^q.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have never yet experienced these blessings in their souls—

[By the greater part of those who call themselves Christians, the whole of this subject is accounted visionary and absurd. They have no idea of one person being filled with the Spirit any more than others: and all the joyous frames arising from his presence in the soul, they deem the very essence of enthusiasm. But what, then, can be meant by all those directions which are given us, to “live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit,” and “pray in the Spirit,” and to “bring forth the fruits of the Spirit?” And why has our blessed Lord so encouraged us to pray for the gift of his Spirit^r, if no such communication is to be expected by us?

^p Col. iii. 16.

^q Heb. xiii. 15. 1 Pet. ii. 5.

^r Luke xi. 11—13.

Do not, I beseech you, brethren, take your own experience as the standard of truth, or imagine that no one else can possess what you have never received: but look to God for the accomplishment of his gracious promises to your souls^s; and never rest, till you have obtained those supplies of his Spirit, whereby alone you can attain the Christian character, or be ever fitted for the realms of bliss^t."]

2. Those who profess to live in the enjoyment of them—

[Regard not the contempt with which ungodly men may treat you: but let the Apostle's direction be followed by you daily, with increasing earnestness. Be careful, however, not to give any just occasion for reproach. Let there be nothing extravagant, either in your profession or your practice. Religion, if it have its just influence upon your soul, will render you patterns of sobriety, of prudence, and of true wisdom: it will cause you to "walk wisely before God, in a perfect way." At the same time, it will bring into your soul a peace that passeth all understanding and a joy that is unspeakable and glorified. There will be, indeed, occasional changes in your frame, even as there are in the natural world: there will be times for the tears of penitential sorrow to flow down, as well as for the radiance of the noon-day sun. But the more you live on Tabor, the more will you behold the Saviour's glory: and the more you survey the promised land from Pisgah's top, the more will you be fitted for the everlasting enjoyment of it.]

^s Prov. i. 22, 23.

^t John xvi. 7—11.

MMCXXI.

THE MARRIAGE UNION.

Eph. v. 21—33. *Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no*

man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

AMONGST those who are attached to the peculiarities of the Gospel, it is often a subject of regret, that the great mass of nominal Christians are not acquainted with its *principles*. But I am inclined to think, that there is nearly the same occasion for regret, that many who profess, and actually have attained, somewhat of vital godliness, are but very imperfectly instructed in its *duties*. The sublimer parts of morality are really almost as little known as the deeper mysteries of our holy religion. Take, for instance, the conduct enjoined in the fourteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans: I doubt whether there be many who would have written such a piece of casuistry: and few, I fear, would have approved of it when written, if it had not come forth with the authority of a divine revelation. What a paradox would it appear to the generality, if I were to tell them, that the very same act, under different circumstances, might be an acceptable service and a damning sin; and the whole difference consisting in its being done in the presence of one who approved of it, or of one who doubted its lawfulness! Yet such is the Apostle's determination respecting the practice of things indifferent in themselves; and which become bounden duties, or fatal sins, according to the views which they have who do them. I could, if there were time, illustrate the sublimity of the Christian code, in reference to all our most acknowledged duties: but I shall confine myself to the subject more appropriate to the present occasion^a. St. Paul, in this passage, places the duties of man and wife in a

^a An extemporaneous Address at the Marriage of a Friend.

light peculiarly simple and beautiful. He comprehends both under one single term : “ Wives, *submit* : Husbands, *love*.” Thus far we are prepared to approve of his requisitions ; the duties respectively belonging to the two parties being generally acknowledged. But, if I should proceed to place these requisitions in their true light, and insist upon them in their full extent, I am not sure that I should not excite, amongst the less-instructed part of us at least, a measure of surprise. Yet I am not afraid, but that, if in the former part of my observations I should appear to bear somewhat hard upon the female sex, I shall, before I close the subject, find a perfect acquiescence on their part, when they shall see what provision God has made for their happiness in wedded life. But I shall be careful to speak nothing myself : I shall only bring before you what the Apostle has spoken : and if his demands appear to be too severe, I shall shelter myself under his wing ; being well assured that you will all yield to his authority, without gainsaying.

You must have observed, that in all the passages of Scripture where the relative duties are insisted on, those of the inferior are always stated first. Nor is this without reason : for they are all enjoined by God : and, however difficult they may appear, especially where the superior neglects to perform the duties assigned to him, they must all be observed from a regard to the authority of that God who has imposed them ; nor must any one imagine, that his duties are a whit the less incumbent on him because the superior neglects his. Power, in whomsoever it is vested, is God’s : and the person bearing it, so far as it is truly committed to him, is God’s representative and vicegerent. And I conceive, that this is the reason of that order, which, from being uniformly observed in the Scriptures, we may well suppose to have been wittingly and wisely fixed.

The submission of the wife to her husband must be entire, cheerful, uniform, “ as unto the Lord,” because the husband is as truly the head of the wife,

as Christ is the Head of the Church. And I hope I shall not appear to speak too strongly, if I say, that there is no other limit to her submission to her earthly lord, than to her heavenly ; unless he require any thing that is contrary to the will of God : for then she must yield to that authority which is paramount, and obey God rather than man. I certainly feel, that, in speaking thus, I may appear to require too much of the wife, and to place her almost on the footing of a slave. But you yourselves shall judge. Tell me what is the meaning of those words, "*As the Church is subject unto Christ*, so let the wives be to their own husbands, *in every thing?*" I confess to you that this appears somewhat harsh ; and I should not have dared to utter it myself. But I am not at liberty to soften it, or to introduce into God's word any qualifying expressions, to lower the standard he has given us. You yourselves see the comparison which is instituted by God himself, and the extent of the requisition that is made. Had the comparison been omitted, we might possibly have thought that the expression, "*every thing*," was, what is confessedly common in the Scriptures, an *universal* term put for a *general* ; and that, consequently, it did admit of some modifications and exceptions. But who will so construe the obedience which the Church owes to Christ ? If, then, we cannot so limit the requisition in the one case, neither can we in the other : and, consequently, in our statement of the duties of a wife, we must take the ground which is laid in Scripture, and set forth the will of God as it is plainly declared in the inspired volume.

But, though so much is required of the wife, that I could not have ventured to state it in any terms but those of Scripture itself, I must candidly acknowledge that I account it a rich mercy to the wife that her duty is thus highly stated and plainly declared. For it must of necessity happen, in a married state, that some differences of opinion should occasionally arise, and a contrariety of inclination also occur, in reference to some points : and if God had not determined

beforehand whose judgment should preponderate, and whose will should stand, there might be collisions, which might painfully interrupt domestic harmony. But God, having required unqualified submission on the part of the wife, has cut off all occasion for discord ; I may almost say, all possibility of it, where the wife understands her duty, and is ready to perform it. Of course, a modest statement, both of her sentiments and wishes, may be given : but where her husband cannot by these means be persuaded, she has no alternative left : obedience is the course which God has ordained for her ; and she should pay it cheerfully, “as unto the Lord.”

If this appear, as I fear it will, “an hard saying,” I am happy to say, that that impression will soon be removed, by stating, in the next place, the duties of the husband. “Husbands, love your wives.” And what difficulty is there in obeying the commands of love, or in submitting to its dictates ?

But here we observe, in relation to him, the counterpart of the comparison which has been before made in relation to the wife. Is the wife to submit to her husband as unreservedly as the Church submits to Christ ? Know ye, that the husband is to love his wife as truly and tenderly, yea, and, as far as it is possible, to the very same extent too, “as Christ has loved the Church.” Let us contemplate this a little ; and we shall subscribe heartily to all that has been before spoken. Consider how the Lord Jesus Christ has loved the Church. She was altogether alienated from him, and incapable of adding to his happiness ; yet did he disrobe himself of all the glory and blessedness of heaven, yea, and assume our nature, and “bear our sins in his own body on the tree,” on purpose to bring his Church into a full and everlasting participation of his kingdom and glory. And now that he has done this, he imposes no one command on her but what conduces to her happiness : and if in any thing he thwart her inclinations, he does it for her good ; consulting, in every thing, not his own sovereign will, but her present and eternal welfare.

Now, let us suppose a husband to act on this principle: let us suppose him ready to exercise self-denial, to the utmost possible extent, for the good of his wife: let us suppose him so to pant after her happiness, as to be willing to do any thing, or suffer any thing, in order to promote it: let us suppose him never to propose any thing to her, but for her good; and never, in any instance, to thwart her, but with a view to her truest happiness: methinks she would never complain of the extent of her duty to him; it would be all easy, all delightful. Let it be remembered, then, that this is the husband's duty to his wife. But as, in the former case, I confined myself to the very words of Scripture, so will I do in this; lest I appear to over-state the duty on the husband's part. "Husbands, love your wives; even as Christ also loved the Church, and *gave himself for it*, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, *that he might present it to himself a glorious Church*, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy, and without blemish." Let there be such tender, affectionate, self-denying exertions on the husband's part, to promote the welfare and happiness of his wife; and what returns will not she readily make to him? Verily, submission to his will, will be not so much her duty as her delight.

As for the other comparison contained in this passage, namely, of the man loving his wife as his own flesh, I forbear to make any observations upon it, wishing to detain you as short a time as possible.

There is one thing only that I will add, which will be applicable to us all. Hitherto I have dwelt chiefly on those points which the occasion has suggested: but let us not forget, that the whole Church of Christ is his bride; and that the duty of a wife towards her husband, as set forth in this passage, may serve to shew us, in some measure, our duty towards our heavenly Lord. Does a wife leave her father and mother, and cleave to her husband? so must we forsake all that is dear to us in this world, to cleave

unto Christ : for he has expressly warned us, that "if, in coming to him, we forsake not all that we have, we cannot be his disciples." We must also fulfil his will in every thing, without hesitation and without reserve. Obedience to him must be our delight : and if, for a moment, a wish arise in our minds that is contrary to his will, we must sacrifice it instantly ; and say, "Not my will, but thine be done." Thus, whilst "the mystery concerning Christ and his Church" is *mystically* fulfilled in our dear friends who are about to be joined together in the bonds of matrimony, it will be *literally* and *spiritually* fulfilled in us.

MMCXXII.

THE PERFECTING OF THE CHURCH IS THE END OF ALL
THAT CHRIST HAS DONE FOR IT.

Eph. v. 25—27. *Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it ; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

THE morality of the Gospel, though not more extensive than that of the law, is yet more clearly revealed, and exhibited in a more endearing light. Its obligations are not set forth amidst denunciations of wrath, as those of the law were upon Mount Sinai ; but models of perfection are set before us, and we are invited by considerations of love and gratitude to make them the objects of our imitation. Not only our duty to God, but even our relative duties are set before us in this manner. St. Paul, instructing wives in their duty to their husbands, tells them, that the Church's obedience to Christ is the fittest pattern of their obedience to them. Then instructing husbands how to conduct themselves toward their wives, he proposes to them Christ's love to his Church as the model for their love to their wives. It is in this connexion that the words of our text are introduced.

But the Apostle can never touch upon so glorious a topic as the love of Christ, without expatiating upon it, and being transported, as it were, to a forgetfulness of his proper argument. The view which he here gives us of it, is deserving of peculiar attention. It will lead us to consider,

I. The demonstrations which Christ has given us of his love—

He loved his Church from before the foundation of the world : and he has displayed his love to it in a manner that must fill both men and angels with everlasting astonishment. Every member of it was dearer to him than his own happiness ; more desirable to him, if we may so speak, than his own glory. He loved us to such a degree, that for our sakes he gave up the happiness which he enjoyed in his Father's bosom, and the glory which he possessed upon his Father's throne : he gave himself for us, that he might be,

1. A surety for our persons—

[The debt which we owed to divine justice could never be discharged by mortal man : nor was there any superior being able or willing to take upon himself our awful responsibility. Our case was desperate, as much so as that of the fallen angels. But the Son of God, of his own infinitely rich grace and mercy, was pleased to undertake for us^a. What Paul said to Philemon respecting Onesimus, he said to his Father respecting us ; “ What do they owe thee ? put it all to my account : I will repay thee. Whatever shall be necessary to ransom them from the hands of incensed justice, let it be exacted of me : I will be answerable for it ; I will pay it, to the uttermost farthing^b.”]

2. A sacrifice for our sins—

[It was not by corruptible things, as silver and gold, that we could be redeemed. Satisfaction must be made for all our violations of God's holy law. Death was the desert of man ; and death must be endured by the Son of God himself, if he should put himself in the place of sinful man. This was fully known to our adorable Saviour ; and yet he would not shrink from the conditions. He had set his heart upon his chosen

^a 1 Tim. ii. 6.

^b Philemon, ver. 18, 19.

people, and he was prepared to pay the price, even though it were his own life. Accordingly he took our nature for the express purpose of offering it up a sacrifice for sin. In that nature he made a full atonement for all our transgressions, and satisfied the utmost demands of law and justice. In short, he so gave himself to be an offering and sacrifice to God, that God smelled a sweet savour, and became instantly reconciled to his offending creatures^c.

What manner of love was this! Who can ever explore "its heights and depths, its length and breadth?" Well may "God commend his love to us" by this particular instance^d; for it is, and ever must be, without a parallel: it as far exceeds our conceptions as it does our deserts.]

To assign any adequate reasons for such love is impossible: but the riches of it will appear in a striking point of view, if we consider,

II. The ends for which it has been so demonstrated—

The design of Jesus in the whole of his mediatory work has been, to bring back our fallen race to the enjoyment of all that they had lost by sin. He gave himself for us, that we might enjoy,

1. A restoration to his image—

[It was not merely a salvation from misery that Christ came to impart, but a salvation from sin, which is the cause of misery. He came to set us apart for God as a holy and peculiar people; and to cleanse us not only in "the laver of regeneration in baptism, but by the renewing of the Holy Ghost." The washing of water in baptism was only the external sign of that spiritual grace which it is the delight of his soul to bestow. "He will sprinkle clean water upon us, and cleanse us from all our filthiness, and from all our idols^e." Without this spiritual renovation, all his other mercies would be in vain. Man could not be happy, if he were not first made holy.

The instrument by which this grace is conveyed to the soul, is the word of God. The word, both written and preached, is that whereby we are begotten of him^f; by which also, as new-born babes, we are nourished^g; and by which the whole work of sanctification is carried on^h. The Holy Spirit indeed is the agent, who renders the word effectual: but the Gospel is "the rod of his strength," and it is by that he renovates and saves the world.]

^c Rom. v. 8.

^d ver. 2.

^e Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26.

^f Jam. i. 18.

^g 1 Pet. ii. 2.

^h John xv. 3.

2. A participation of his glory—

[When sinners are in a measure cleansed with the washing of water by the word, the ministers who have been instrumental to that change, “espouse them to one husband, and present them as a chaste virgin to Christⁱ.” And while the work of sanctification is advancing in them, they are like those virgins who were destined for the embrace of eastern monarchs, who were purified during several months for that end, till they were judged meet for the dignity to which they were to be exalted^k. The time for their complete honour and felicity is the day of judgment; when the Bridegroom himself shall come to take them home to himself, and to fix them in the mansions prepared for them. Then they will be “without spot or wrinkle; they will be perfectly holy and without blemish.” They will be “presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy^l.” What “a glorious Church” will they then be! Here their glory is obscured by spots and blemishes: but there they will not have “any such thing:” they will be “pure as God is pure,” and “perfect as God is perfect.”

If any thing can account for the stupendous efforts of Christ’s love, it must be *this*. *This* is an end worthy of the Supreme Being. *This* will be such a display of his power and grace as will for ever fill all heaven with wonder and admiration.]

Suffer ye now “a word of EXHORTATION,” grounded on the foregoing subject—

1. Desire holiness—

[This is what the Lord Jesus Christ has desired for you. To obtain this for you, he divested himself of all his glory, and endured the accursed death of the cross. He desired this for you, because it was the only medium through which you could arrive at happiness, and because it could not fail of rendering you completely happy. Ah! do not despise it. Do not turn away from it, as inimical to your welfare. Do not consider it as a mere system of restraints, a burthen that is intolerable. It is in truth the perfection of your nature, and the completest liberty: it is a liberty from the thralldom of corruption, and from the tyranny of Satan. Desire it therefore, even as Christ has desired it for you; and never think any sacrifice too great for the attainment of it.]

2. Use the means of attaining it—

ⁱ 2 Cor. xi. 2. Ps. xlv. 13, 14.

^k Esth. ii. 12.

^l Jude, ver. 24.

[The word is the means which God in every age has made use of for the recovery of fallen man. By that he converted thousands in the primitive ages of the Church: and by that he is still carrying on his work in the souls of men. Let the Scriptures then be searched by you, not to gratify curiosity merely, or to exercise a critical acumen, but to obtain the knowledge of God's will, and an increasing conformity to his image. Read the sacred volume as a book that is to make you holy. When you hear the word preached to you, hear it with a desire to get a deeper discovery of your sins, and a more perfect victory over them. Whether you read, or hear, or meditate, or pray, let it be with an immediate view to grow in holiness and a meetness for glory.]

3. Look forward to the perfection of holiness as the consummation and completion of all your wishes—

[Higher than this you cannot look; and lower you ought not. This was the ultimate design of all that Christ undertook for you, and of all that he did and suffered for you. Do but consider how happy you will be when not a spot or blemish can be found in you, even by God himself; when you shall be perfectly like your God; and when you shall enjoy the most intimate and endearing fellowship with your Lord, without any alloy, or intermission, or end. Do not rest in any thing short of this. Suffer not any of the pleasures of time and sense to rob you of it. Surely the very prospect of such glory is enough to kindle in your souls the devoutest rapture, and to stimulate you to incessant activity in your Christian course. Yield yourselves now unfeignedly to the Lord^m, and he will, in the last day, present you to himself, and acknowledge you as his for evermore.]

^m Rom. xii. 1.

MMCXXIII.

UNION WITH CHRIST.

Eph. v. 30. *We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.*

THAT the eternal Son of God assumed our nature, and lived and died for the salvation of men, is doubtless the fundamental truth on which we are to build our hopes. But we shall have a very partial view of that truth, if we consider it merely in reference to our acceptance with God. The Apostles

state it as the strongest of all motives to obedience, and as the pattern which, as far as circumstances will admit of it, we are bound to imitate. To go no further than the context; St. Paul is stating the duties of husbands and wives: and, having observed that wives are to be as obedient to their husbands, in all lawful things, as the Church is to Christ, he shews, that husbands are not, however, at liberty to act the tyrant; but that they should at all times be influenced by love, and consult the good and happiness of their wives, as much as Christ himself does of the Church, to whom he stands in a similar relation^a.

The words before us are, in this view, deserving of the deepest attention; since they not only unfold a most mysterious and important truth, but tend in the highest degree to meliorate our tempers, and to diffuse universal happiness. Let us consider then,

I. The union which subsists between Christ and his Church—

There is a *personal* union which Christ has with our nature, by means of his incarnation^b, and which was necessary for the executing of the great work which he had undertaken^c. But in this the whole human race participate, without any distinction. The union which Christ has with the Church is distinct from that, and is,

1. Legal—

[There is, among men, an union between a debtor and his surety; insomuch that, if a debt be not discharged, the surety is as much answerable for it as if he had contracted it himself: and if, on the contrary, it be discharged by the surety, the creditor has no further claim on him that contracted it. Thus it is with respect to Christ and his Church. He is the surety of the new covenant^d: having undertaken for us, he was charged with our debt; “it was exacted of him, and he was made answerable^e.” Having paid the debt, his payment is put to our account; “By his obedience we are made righteous^f.” In a word, “He who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that

^a ver. 22—30.

^d Heb. vii. 22.

^f Rom. v. 19.

^b John i. 14.

^e Isai. liii. 7. Bishop Lowth's version.

^c Heb. ii. 11, 14, 16.

we (who had no righteousness) might be made the righteousness of God in him^g.”]

2. Spiritual—

[Very much is spoken in Scripture respecting the spiritual union which subsists between Christ and his people. To mark that they stand by him alone, it is compared to a foundation and the superstructure^h. To shew that he is the one source of vital influence to them all, it is illustrated by a root and the branchesⁱ. To intimate that one Spirit pervades both him and them^k, it is set forth under the image of a body; he being the Head, and they the members^l. To convey some idea of the tender endearments with which it is accompanied, it is shadowed forth by a marriage union. This is the representation given in the text. He is our husband^m; and we are his brideⁿ: and, as Adam said of Eve when she was brought to him, “She is flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bones^o,” so may we say respecting the Lord Jesus Christ, “We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.”]

Whatever beauty there is in all the other figures, methinks there is a peculiar propriety in that which is now under our consideration, because it marks that volition, yea, and those means also, whereby the union is effected. The Lord Jesus Christ displays before our eyes his excellency and glory, his suitableness and sufficiency; and, by the constraining influence of his love, inclines us to leave all that has hitherto been esteemed by us, in order to connect ourselves with him, and enjoy his presence^p. We accept that gracious proposal, “Thou shalt not be for another man; so will I also be for thee^q,” and being thus engaged by a solemn covenant, we surrender up ourselves to him, whether it be for better or for worse in this world, determining through grace to “be faithful unto him, even until death.”]

We prosecute the idea of a marriage union no further at present, because it will be more fully opened, while we shew,

II. The blessings resulting from it—

It is needless to expatiate upon the comforts and benefits of that relation among men: but we cannot be too minute in specifying the blessings that result from an union with Christ. The chief of them will come under our review, while we observe, that,

^g 2 Cor. v. 21.

^h Eph. ii. 20—22.

ⁱ John xv. 5.

^k 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^l Eph. iv. 15, 16.

^m Isai. liv. 5.

ⁿ Rev. xxi. 9.

^o Gen. ii. 23.

^p Ps. xlv. 10, 11. Mark x. 29, 30.

^q Hos. iii. 3.

1. He has communion with us in all our trials—

[One who understands the duties of a husband, and labours faithfully to discharge them, is ever ready to sympathize with his partner in her afflictions of whatever kind, and solicitous to the utmost to relieve them. What is done to her, whether it be good or evil, he considers it as done to himself. Thus it is with our blessed Lord. Are we tempted?— — — a consciousness of his relation to us calls forth his sympathy, and engages his utmost exertions on our behalf^r — — — Are we persecuted? He feels in his inmost soul the dagger that pierces us^s — — — Do we labour under distresses of any kind? “In all our afflictions he is afflicted^t,” and every attempt made to mitigate our trouble, he accepts, as if he himself were personally relieved^u — — —]

2. We have communion with him in all his benefits—

[A woman, from whatever rank she be taken, is no sooner united in the marriage-bond, than she is exalted to a participation of all the honours and possessions of her husband. Thus it is with the Church when united unto Christ. Is he possessed of a perfect righteousness, commensurate with the highest demands of law and justice? They who are joined to him by faith, are partakers of it all, and may boldly call him, “The Lord our Righteousness^x.” However sinful they may have been in former times, “in him shall they be justified, and in him may they glory^y” — — — Has he within himself an inexhaustible fountain of grace^z? They may receive it out of his fulness^a: and having had a measure of it communicated to them, they may go to him for more^b: yea, whatever supplies they may need, they shall have sufficient for them^c; sufficient to mortify every sin^d, to fulfil every duty^e, to triumph over every enemy^f — — — Is he enthroned on high, the heir and Lord of all things^g? Let not his people think that even these things are too great for them: for they shall have a throne like unto his throne^h, a kingdom like unto his kingdomⁱ, a glory like unto his glory^k — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have reason to believe that they are “married to Christ^l”—

^r Heb. ii. 17, 18. and iv. 15. ^s Zech. ii. 8. Acts ix. 4.

^t Isai. lxiii. 9. ^u Matt. xxv. 35—40. ^x Jer. xxiii. 6.

^y Isai. xlv. 24, 25. ^z Col. i. 19. ^a John i. 16.

^b Jam. iv. 6. ^c 2 Cor. xii. 9. ^d Rom. vi. 14.

^e Phil. iv. 13. ^f Rom. viii. 37. ^g Heb. i. 2.

^h Rev. iii. 21. ⁱ Luke xxii. 29. ^k John xvii. 22.

^l Jer. iii. 14. Isai. lxii. 5.

[If we congratulate our friends when they are settled in life with a fair prospect of happiness, shall we not much more congratulate you; you, who by your connexion with Christ are become children of the living God^m? What earthly advancement can be compared with this? Who among the children of men is so wise to discern, so tender to regard, so able to relieve, your every want? We hope that you know your union with him. It is certainly your privilege to know it, and to rejoice in itⁿ. “Rejoice then in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice^o” — — — But together with your privileges, remember also the duties which this high relation bringeth with it. Would you be unfaithful to him, or grieve him in any thing? God forbid. Remember the fervent attachment^p, the humble reverence^q, the unreserved submission^r, which a dutiful wife feels towards her husband: and let these feelings be transferred in the highest possible degree to your august “Head^s,” and be exercised towards him without any intermission or alloy^t. — — —]

2. Those who have no evidence that such an union has been formed—

[They who have felt no need of an union with Christ, will be ready to say, like Ezekiel’s hearers, “Ah! Lord God, doth he not speak parables^u?” But indeed “we speak forth the words of truth and soberness^x.” You hope to bring forth fruit to God in some other way than by an union with Christ: but you may as well expect a branch to be fruitful, when separated from the vine^y. The image in the text is applied by St. Paul in reference to this very thing: he tells us, that “we must be married unto Christ, that we may bring forth fruit unto God^z.” Moreover, if you be not united to Christ in this world, you will in vain hope for an union with him in the world to come. This is the time wherein you are to be betrothed to him. Seek then to know him: seek to become an object of his regard: seek to be united to him as intimately as he is to his Heavenly Father^a. Be not contented with *seeking*, but *strive*; strive to obtain an interest in his favour; nor cease from your labour till you can say, “My beloved is mine, and

^m John i. 12.

ⁿ John xiv. 20.

^o Phil. iv. 4.

^p Tit. ii. 4.

^q Eph. v. 33.

^r Eph. v. 22, 24. 1 Pet. iii. 1, 5, 6. ^s Eph. v. 23. 1 Cor. xi. 3.

^t If this were preached on the occasion of a *Marriage*, it would be proper to shew to the parties present, that their cheerful performance of their relative duties is indispensable, as an evidence of their union to Christ.

^u Ezek. xx. 49.

^x Acts xxvi. 25.

^y John xv. 4, 5.

^z Rom. vii. 4.

^a John xvii. 21. and vi. 56, 57.

I am his^b.” Then shall you have the most delightful fellowship with him^c: you shall have such manifestations of his regard, as the world can neither know nor receive^d: and, when all earthly connexions shall cease, your happiness shall be consummated in the everlasting fruition of his love^e.]

^b Cant. ii. 16.

^c 1 John i. 3.

^d John xiv. 21, 22. ib. ver. 17.

^e 1 Thess. iv. 17.

MMCXXIV.

UNION BETWEEN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE.

Eph. v. 32. *This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.*

CHRISTIANITY is a mystery altogether—a great mystery: as it is written, “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory^a.” Every part of it is mysterious: its plan, as concerted between the Father and the Son^b; its propagation, so as to incorporate in one body the whole world both of Jews and Gentiles^c; the representations given of it in emblematic types from the foundation of the world. Amongst these, the marriage of our first parents is worthy of particular attention. It is that to which the Apostle especially refers in the passage before us. The very words spoken by Adam on that occasion are quoted by him^d. They appear, indeed, at first sight, to be spoken only in reference to marriage generally: but he declares, and pronounces it “a great mystery,” that “he spake concerning Christ and the Church.”

Here it is evident that there was one thing spoken, and another intended; and, consequently, if we would fully enter into the Apostle’s mind, we must consider, I. The subject ostensibly proposed—

He is speaking of the duties which men owe to each other, in the relation of husband and wife,

^a 1 Tim. iii. 16. ^b Col. ii. 2. ^c Rom. xi. 25. Eph. i. 9, 10.

^d Gen. ii. 23, 24. with ver. 30, 31.

parents and children, masters and servants. That of husband and wife, as existing before all others, is introduced first.

He specifies their duties—

[He specifies hers to him, and his to her. Her duty to him is comprised in reverence and subjection ; in reverence to him as her head ; in subjection to him as her lord. His duty to her comprehends unrivalled affection, and unbounded care. These were their respective duties, whilst yet they remained in innocence : for they arose out of the manner in which their union was formed. The man was first formed, the lord and governor of the whole earth. The woman was made afterwards, and taken out of the side of man as a part of his substance ; and therefore was properly subject to him. She, too, was made for man, and not man for her : and, consequently, this put her still further under his controul. These duties, however, were still further extended after man had fallen : for the woman, having been first in the transgression, was doomed to weaknesses and pains which she would never otherwise have experienced, and was still more entirely subjected to her husband's rule^e. But, in proportion as she needed his protection, his obligation to extend it to her was increased, together with all its attendant sympathy and assiduities.]

He at the same time illustrates them by a comparison—

[The Apostle institutes a comparison between the marriage union and that which subsists between Christ and his Church ; and *again and again* reverts to it, in order to mark the correspondence between them in every particular. In speaking of the wife's duties to her husband, he says, "*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord : for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church ; and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, as the Church is subject unto Christ,* so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing^f." Now, here the Apostle states, in the clearest and fullest manner, both *the extent* of her duties and *the ground* of them. All the subjection which the Church owes to Christ, she owes to her husband ; subordinate only to the paramount obligations which she owes to Christ himself : and she owes them to him for the very same reason ; namely, because her husband is her head and protector, just as the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head and Saviour of his whole mystical body, the Church.

Next, in speaking of the husband's duty to his wife, he

^e Gen. iii. 16. with 1 Tim. ii. 11—14.

^f ver. 22—24.

draws a similar comparison between Christ's love and tenderness to his Church, and that which a man should exercise towards his wife. *The object he should have in view also*, in all the controul which he exercises over her, should be precisely such as Christ has manifested towards his Church; namely, the advancement of her real welfare. *To a similar extent, also*, should he carry this into effect; willingly denying himself, and submitting gladly to the greatest privations, if only he may attain his end, and promote her best interests. Hear the Apostle's own words; and mark especially how minutely the Apostle enters into the objects which Christ has accomplished in behalf of his Church, in order the more clearly to shew what the husband should aim at in reference to his wife: "Husbands, love your wives, *even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish*^g." Then, going on with a special reference to *Eve, who was a part of Adam's own body*, he adds, "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself: for no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, *even as the Lord the Church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife: and they two shall be one flesh*^h." All this shews us with what intensity of affection a man should regard his wife; and with what tender care he should labour for her temporal, spiritual, and eternal good.]

Now, here we should have stopped, as having brought into view all that the Apostle designed. But, what the Apostle has spoken in our text necessarily leads us to the contemplation of another subject, even,

II. The subject covertly intended—

We are perfectly surprised when we hear the Apostle unexpectedly declaring, "I speak all this concerning Christ and his Church." Truly, "this is a mystery." Let us consider,

1. The mystery itself—

[Under the image of a marriage union, the Apostle has been speaking of Christ and his Church, *between whom there*

^g ver. 25—27.

^h ver. 28—31.

exists the same relation as between a man and his wife. The Lord Jesus Christ is “a Bridegroom, and the Church is his bride.” This is the language both of the Old Testamentⁱ and the New^k: and between them exists a closer union than ever existed between a man and his wife: for *they* are, by their union, made “*one flesh*”^l; but Christ and his Church are “*one spirit*”^m. They too, inasmuch as Christ has taken upon him our nature, may be called *one body*; so that, in reference to Christ, it may be said of us, “We are members of his body, even of his flesh and of his bones.” But I say again, that, inasmuch as we have a *spiritual* union with Christ, our connexion with him is closer than any that can exist between persons joined in the marriage bond; who, though *one flesh*, may be, and too often are, far from being united *in spirit*.

By virtue of the union of Christ with his Church, she *partakes of all the privileges* which a marriage union can convey. He is entitled to the entire possession of our whole hearts: and *we* become partakers of all his honours, and all his wealth, and all his influence, and all his love. Nothing can be conceived as enjoyed by a woman in virtue of the marriage relation which she has entered into, that is not imparted to us in the richest possible abundance, as soon as we believe in Christ. On the other hand, there are *the same obligations entailed upon us*. The Lord Jesus Christ, if I may so speak, as bound in covenant to us, will order every thing for our good: and we, as given up to him in covenant, are bound to “forsake all for him”ⁿ, and “to live for him, and not for another”^o. To serve him, and honour him, and glorify him, must from henceforth be our supreme happiness, our only care. This is plainly set forth by the Psalmist, who says, “Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for *He is thy Lord*; and worship thou him”^p.] ”

2. The greatness of this mystery—

[It is indeed “great,” whether we consider it as a *speculative truth*, or whether we regard it *in its practical importance*. As a *speculative truth*, how wonderful is it that the God of heaven and earth should become a man, and take into union with himself such worthless and corrupt creatures as we; submitting to the lowest depths of misery, in order to raise us to the highest throne of his glory! That he should acknowledge such a relation between himself and us, and make that relation the means of communicating to us all that felicity, is a mystery

ⁱ Isai. liv. 5.

^k John iii. 29.

^l ver. 31.

^m 1 Cor. vi. 17.

ⁿ Luke xiv. 33.

^o Hos. iii. 3.

^p Ps. xlv. 10, 11.

too big for utterance, too deep for any finite intelligence to explore.

In *its practical importance*, too, it far surpasses all human comprehension. For to effect this union, is *the very end for which the Gospel itself is ministered to man*. St. Paul preached through immense regions, from Jerusalem round about unto Illyricum. And what did he labour to accomplish? What was the effect of his ministrations? He says to his Corinthian converts, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ^a." Now this is our object also, even to solicit, in the behalf of Christ, that you will consent to an union with him, and surrender up yourselves altogether unto him. This union, also, is *the one only means by which you can ever bring forth fruit unto God*. "Separate from Christ," you can no more bear the fruits of holiness, than a branch can bear grapes when separate from the vine^r. St. Paul speaks of this, under the very image contained in our text. He represents us as married, in our unconverted state, to the law: but, on our conversion, the law, as far as respects its power over us, becomes dead; so that we are at liberty to be married unto Christ, and to bear fruit to him: "My brethren," says he, "ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, *that we should bring forth fruit unto God*^s." In no way whatever can the fruits of righteousness be produced by us, except by virtue of union with him: for they are the fruits of his Spirit, communicated to us, and abiding in us^t. I may further add, that *this union, begun on earth, will be perpetuated in heaven for evermore*. Earthly connexions are dissolved by death: this is cemented and confirmed. In this world we are *rather betrothed*, than actually united^u; rather presented for approbation^x, than brought to a full enjoyment of the nuptial bonds. The consummation of the marriage, with the feast attendant on it, is reserved for a better world; and shall take place as soon as the bride is fully prepared for the honours to be conferred upon her. So says St. John, respecting a period yet future, when this glorious ceremony is to be completed: "I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and

^a 2 Cor. xi. 2.

^s Rom. vii. 4.

^u Hos. ii. 19.

^r John xv. 5. *χωρὶς ἐμοῦ*.

^t Gal. v. 22, 23. Rom. vi. 22.

^x 2 Cor. xi. 2.

white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God^y."

Say now, whether any thing can exceed the importance of this mystery? You perceive, that to accomplish it is *the end of all our ministrations*; the actual completion of it is *the only means of sanctification to your souls*; and *the full enjoyment of it in all its inconceivable benefits, is heaven*. Verily, "this is a *great mystery*;" nor will eternity suffice for its full development.]

Let me now, in CONCLUSION, entreat of you these two things :

1. Seek by faith to realize this mystery—

[It must be realized by all: and the only way in which it can be realized, is, by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is faith which unites us to him: it is faith which interests us in him, and which brings down from him all that our souls can stand in need of. Though the mystery which we have been contemplating is great, yet the means by which we are to have it realized are simple. Only believe in Christ, as becoming man for you, as dying on the cross for you, as giving himself to you in an everlasting covenant; believe in him, I say, as willing to confer on you all the blessings of salvation; and you shall find that you have not believed in vain: for "out of his fulness shall you assuredly receive" all that you can require, and all that he has undertaken to bestow upon you.

And let not the thought of your own unworthiness discourage you: for there are none, however unworthy, whom he will not receive into that relation, if only they will believe in him. See the description given of the Jewish Church previous to her union with him: "When I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live. When I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, *I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee*, saith the Lord God, and *thou becamest mine*^z." What more humiliating condition can you well conceive, than that of a new-born infant, which is here *thrice* repeated, "polluted in its own blood?" Yet out of that state did he select them, and from that condition did he take them for his Church and people. Know

^y Rev. xix. 6—9.

^z Ezek. xvi. 6, 8.

then, that no unworthiness whatever is, or can be, a bar to your union with Christ, if only you will accept his overtures of love and mercy. Nay, if, after having been by profession united to him, you have dishonoured him by the basest unfaithfulness, still he says to you, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for *I am married unto you^a.*" Thus you see, that neither unworthiness before your union to him, nor unfaithfulness after it, need cause you to despair: for "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound^b;" and "those who come unto him, he will in no wise cast out^c."]

2. Endeavour, by works, to recommend and adorn it—

[Persons who hear of your high pretensions, will naturally ask, "What do ye more than others^d?" They have a right to ask this question: and we ought to be able to answer it. If we are brought into so near a relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, we ought to shew the effect which it produces on us. We ought to walk worthy of the new condition into which we are brought, and worthy of Him who has raised us to it^e. The King's daughter ought to be "all glorious within; and her clothing should be of wrought gold^f." There should be in us universal holiness, both in heart and life. The whole "spirit of our minds should be renewed^g;" and we should be altogether "new creatures in Christ Jesus; old things having passed away, and all things having become new^h." Beloved brethren, see that ye answer to this character: see that ye "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good workⁱ," and "filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God^k." This will honour your divine Husband: this will answer the end for which he has chosen you to himself, and will best prove the truth and excellence of the communications you have received from him. Then will another mystery be seen. Men will wonder how it is that you have been enabled so to "put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and so to put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness^l." But they will have the true solution of the phenomenon, when

^a Jer. iii. 13, 14.

^d Matt. v. 47.

^f Ps. xlv. 13.

ⁱ Col. i. 10.

^b Rom. v. 20.

^e Eph. iv. 1. 1 Thess. ii. 12.

^g Eph. iv. 23.

^k Phil. i. 11.

^c John vi. 37.

^h 2 Cor. v. 17.

^l Eph. iv. 22, 24.

they know into what close connexion ye have been brought to the Lord Jesus Christ, and how "mightily his Spirit has wrought within you:" and they will readily receive the mystery which they cannot see, when they are constrained to acknowledge the mystery which they do see. They will be forced to confess that ye are a people whom the Lord has blessed, and that he is with you of a truth.]

MMCXXV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S STRENGTH.

Eph. vi. 10. *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*

THE Christian's life is frequently represented in the Scriptures under the metaphor of a warfare. Christ is called "the Captain of his salvation^a;" and they who have enlisted under his banners, and "quit themselves like men," "fighting the good fight of faith^b," and enduring cheerfully all the hardships of the campaign, are called "good soldiers of Jesus Christ^c." "Like warriors, they do not entangle themselves with the affairs of this life, that they may please him who has chosen them to be soldiers^d;" but they set themselves to "war a good warfare^e," and they look for the rewards of victory, when they shall have subdued all their enemies^f.

In the chapter before us, this subject is not slightly touched, as in the detached passages above referred to, but is treated at large; and that which in other places is only a metaphor, is here a professed simile. St. Paul, standing, as it were, in the midst of the camp, harangues the soldiers, telling them what enemies they have to combat, and how they may guard effectually against all their stratagems, and secure to themselves the victory. He begins with an animating exhortation, wherein he reminds them of the wonderful talents of their General, and urges them to

^a Heb. ii. 10.

^b 1 Cor. xvi. 13. 1 Tim. vi. 12.

^c 2 Tim. ii. 3.

^d 2 Tim. ii. 4.

^e 1 Tim. i. 18.

^f 2 Tim. iii. 7, 8. Rev. iii. 21.

place the most unlimited confidence in his skill and power.

The exhortation being contracted into a very small space, and conveying far more than appears at first sight, we shall consider, first, *What is implied in it*; and afterwards, *What is expressed*.

I. What is *implied* in the exhortation—

The first thing that would naturally occur to any one to whom this exhortation was addressed, is, *that the Christian has need of strength*; for on any other supposition than this, the words would be altogether absurd.

But the Christian will indeed appear to require strength, whether we consider *the work he has to perform*, or *the difficulties he has to cope with*. It is no easy matter to stem the tide of corrupt nature, to controul the impetuous passions, to root out inveterate habits, to turn the current of our affections from the things of time and sense to things invisible and eternal. To renew and sanctify our hearts, and to transform them into the Divine image, is a work far beyond the power of feeble man; yet is it indispensably necessary to his salvation.

But as though this were not of itself sufficient to call forth the Christian's exertions, he has hosts of enemies to contend with, as soon as ever he addresses himself in earnest to the work assigned him. Not to mention all the propensities of his nature, which will instantly rise up in rebellion against him, and exert all their power for the mastery, the world will immediately begin to cry out against him; they will direct all their artillery against him, their scoffs, their ridicule, their threats: his very friends will turn against him; and "those of his own household will become his greatest foes." They would let him go on in the broad road year after year, and not one amongst them would ever exhort him to love and serve his God: but the very moment that he enters on the narrow path that leadeth unto life, they will all, with one heart and one soul, unite their endea-

vours to obstruct his course ; and when they cannot prevail, they will turn their back upon him, and give him up as an irreclaimable enthusiast.

In conjunction with these will Satan (as we shall hereafter have occasion to shew) combine his forces : yea, he will put himself at their head, and direct their motions, and stimulate their exertions, and concur with them to the uttermost to captivate and destroy the heaven-born soul.

And can such work be performed, such difficulties be surmounted, without the greatest efforts ? Surely they who are called to such things, had need “ be strong.”

A second thing implied in the exhortation is, *that the Christian has no strength in himself* ; for, if he had, why should he be exhorted to be strong in another ?

Little do men imagine how extremely impotent they are, in themselves, to that which is good. It must be easy, one would suppose, to *read* and understand *the word* of God, or, at least, to *profit* by a clear and faithful *ministration of it*. But these are far beyond the power of the natural man. The word is “ a sealed book ” to him^g, which, for want of a spiritual discernment, appears a mass of foolishness^h, a “ cunningly devised fableⁱ.” When it was even explained by our Lord, the Apostles, for the space of more than three years, were not able to comprehend its import, till he opened their understandings to understand it^k ; and Lydia, like thousands of others, would have been unmoved by the preaching of Paul, if “ the Lord had not opened her heart ” to apprehend and embrace his word^l. It should seem, however, that if these things be beyond the power of man, he can at least *pray* to God to instruct him. But neither can he do this, unless the Spirit of God “ help his infirmities,” teaching him what to pray

^g Isai. xxix. 11, 12.

ⁱ 2 Pet. i. 16. and Ezek. xx. 49.

^l Acts xvi. 14.

^h 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^k Luke xxiv. 44, 45.

for^m, and assisting him in offering the petitionsⁿ.” If he be insufficient for this work, it may be hoped he is able to *do something*. But our Lord tells us, that, without the special aid of his grace, he “can do nothing^o.” Can he not then *speak* what is good? No; “How can ye, being evil, speak good things^p?” says our Lord: and St. Paul says, “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost^q.” Still may he not *will*, or at least *think*, what is good? We must answer this also in the negative: “It is God alone who worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure^r.” Nor had St. Paul himself, no, not even after his conversion, an ability, of himself, to “think any thing good; his sufficiency was of God, and of God alone^s.” Our impotence cannot be more fitly expressed by any words whatever, than by that expression of the Apostle, “Ye are dead in trespasses and sins^t :” for, till God quicken us from the dead, we are as incapable of all the exercises of the spiritual life, as a breathless corpse is of all the functions of the animal life.

There is yet a third thing implied in this exhortation, namely, *that there is a sufficiency for us in Christ*; for otherwise the Apostle would not have urged us in this manner to be strong in him.

Well does the Apostle speak of Christ’s “mighty power;” for indeed he is almighty, “he has all power committed to him both in heaven and in earth^u.” We may judge of his all-sufficiency by what he wrought when he was on earth: the most inveterate diseases vanished at his touch, at his word, at a mere act of volition, when he was at a distance from the patient. The fishes of the sea were constrained to minister unto him: yea, the devils themselves yielded to his authority, and were instantly forced to liberate their captives at his command: they could not even enter into the swine without his permission. The very elements also were obedient to his word; the

^m Rom. viii. 26. ⁿ Jude, ver. 20. Zech. xii. 10. ^o John xv. 5.

^p Matt. xii. 34.

^q 1 Cor. xii. 3.

^r Phil. ii. 13.

^s 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^t Eph. ii. 1.

^u Matt. xxviii. 18.

winds were still; the waves forbore to roll; the storm that threatened to overwhelm him, became a perfect calm. What then can he not do for those who trust in him? "Is his hand now shortened, that he cannot save? or is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear?" Can he not heal the diseases of our souls, and calm our troubled spirits, and supply our every want? Cannot he who "triumphed over principalities and powers upon the cross, and spoiled them, and led them captive in his ascension^x," fulfil his promise, that "sin shall not have dominion over us^y," and that "Satan shall be bruised under our feet shortly^z?" Doubtless he is "the Lord Jehovah, with whom is everlasting strength^a," and who is therefore "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him^b."

These things being understood as implied in the exhortation, we may more fully comprehend in the II.^d place, what is *expressed* in it.

It is evident that there are two points to which the Apostle designs to lead us: the one is, *to rely on Christ for strength*, the other is, *to "be strong in him," with an assured confidence of success.*

In relation to the first of these we observe, that a general must confide in his army full as much as his army confides in him; for as they cannot move to advantage without an experienced head to guide them, so neither can he succeed in his plans, unless he have a brave and well-appointed army to carry them into execution. It is not thus in the Christian army; there all the confidence is in the General alone. He must not only train his soldiers, and direct them in the day of battle, but he must be with them in the battle, shielding their heads, and strengthening their arms, and animating their courage, and reviving them when faint, and raising them when fallen, and healing them when wounded, and finally, beating down their enemies that they may trample them under their feet.

^x Col. ii. 15. Eph. iv. 8.

^y Rom. vi. 14.

^z Rom. xvi. 20.

^a Isai, xxvi. 4.

^b Heb. vii. 25.

The fulness that is in Christ is treasured up in him for us^c, that we may receive out of it according to our necessities. As he came down from heaven to purchase for us all the gifts of the Spirit, so he has ascended up to heaven that he might bestow them upon us^d, and fill us, each according to his measure, with all the fulness of God^e. Hence previous to his death he said, "Ye believe in God; believe also in me^f:" let that same faith which you repose in God the Father as your Creator, he reposed in me as your Redeemer: let it be full, and implicit: let it extend to every want: let it be firm and unshaken, under all circumstances however difficult, however adverse.

Such was our Lord's direction: and agreeable to it was the experience of the great Apostle, who says, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me^g."

It is characteristic of every Christian soldier to receive thus out of Christ's fulness^h; and to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strengthⁱ."

But the principal point which the Apostle aims at in the text, is, to inspire us with a holy confidence in Christ, so that we may be as much assured of victory as if we saw all our enemies fleeing before us, or already prostrate at our feet. We cannot have a more striking illustration of our duty in this respect than the history of David's combat with Goliath. He would not go against his adversary with armour suited to the occasion: he went forth in the name of the God of Israel; and therefore he did not doubt one moment the issue of the contest: he well knew that God could direct his aim; and that he was as sure of victory without any other arms than a sling and a stone from his shepherd's bag, as he could be with the completest armour that Saul himself could

^c Col. i. 19. Eph. i. 22, 23.

^e Eph. iii. 19. and iv. 7.

^g Gal. ii. 20.

^d Eph. iv. 10.

^f John xiv. 1.

ⁱ Isai. xlv. 24.

^h John i. 16.

give him^k. What David thus *illustrated*, we may see *exemplified* in the conduct of St. Paul: "If God be for us," says he, "who can be against us?" Who is he that shall condemn me? (shall the law curse me? or Satan overcome me?) I fear none of them; since "Christ has died, yea rather, is risen again, and maketh intercession for me. Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us: for I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord^l." Thus it is that we must go forth against all the enemies of our salvation: we must "have no confidence in the flesh^m;" neither must we have any doubt respecting the all-sufficiency of our God: the weakest among us should boldly say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what men or devils can do against meⁿ:" "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me^o."

IN APPLYING this subject to the different classes of professing Christians, we should first address ourselves to *the self-confident*.

It is the solemn declaration of God, that "by strength shall no man prevail^p." We might hope that men would be convinced of this truth by their own experience. Who amongst us has not made vows and resolutions without number, and broken them again almost as soon as they were made? Who ever resolved to devote himself unfeignedly to God, and did not find, that he was unable steadfastly to pursue his purpose? What folly is it then to be renewing these vain attempts, when we have the

^k 1 Sam. xvii. 45—47. ^l Rom. viii. 31—39. ^m Phil. iii. 3.

ⁿ Heb. xiii. 6.

^o Phil. iv. 13.

^p 1 Sam. ii. 9. See also Rom. ix. 16. and Zech. iv. 6. and John i. 13.

evidence both of Scripture and experience that we cannot succeed! How much better would it be to trust in that “mighty One, on whom help is laid^a!” Learn, brethren, before it be too late, that “without CHRIST you can do nothing:” that “all your fresh springs are in *him*:” and “of *him* must your fruit be found^s:” “in *him* alone shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory^t.” If you will not “be strong in *him*,” you will continue “without strength:” but if once you truly “know him, you shall be strong, and do exploits^u.”

We would next claim the attention of *the timid*. It is but too common for the Lord’s people to be indulging needless fears, like David, when he said, “I shall one day perish by the hands of Saul^x.” But surely such deserve the rebuke which our Lord gave to Peter, “O thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt^y?” If thou doubtest the Lord’s willingness to save thee, say, wherefore did he die for thee, even for the chief of sinners? If thou callest in question his power, what is there in thy case that can baffle Omnipotence? If thou art discouraged on account of thy own weakness, know that the weaker thou art in thyself, the stronger thou shalt be in *him*^z; and that “he will perfect his own strength in thy weakness^a.” If thou fearest on account of the strength and number of thine enemies, he meets thy fears with this salutary admonition; “Say ye not, A confederacy, a confederacy; but sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread^b.” Only trust in him; and though weak, he will strengthen thee^c; though faint, he will revive thee^d; though wounded, he will heal thee^e; though captive, he will liberate thee^f; though slain, he will raise thee up again, and give thee the victory

^a Ps. lxxxix. 19.^r Ps. lxxxvii. 7.^s Hos. xiv. 8.^t Isai. xlv. 25.^u Dan. xi. 32.^x 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.^y Matt. xiv. 31.^z 2 Cor. xii. 10.^a 2 Cor. xii. 9.^b Isai. viii. 12, 13.^c Isai. xxvi. 6.^d Isai. xl. 29—31.^e Exod. xv. 26. Isai. xxxiii. 23.^f Isai. xiv. 2. and xlix. 24, 25.

over all thine enemies^g. “Be strong then and very courageous^h :” abhor the thought of indulging a cowardly spirit, as long as “God’s throne is in heavenⁱ ;” and assure yourselves, with David, that though your “enemies encompass you as bees, in the name of the Lord you shall destroy them^k.”

Lastly, let *the victorious* Christian listen to a word of counsel. We are apt to be elated in the time of victory, and to arrogate to ourselves some portion of the glory. But God solemnly cautions us against this^l : and if, with Nebuchadnezzar or Sennacherib, we take the glory to ourselves, the time is nigh at hand when God will fearfully abase us^m. We cannot do better than take the Psalmist for our pattern : he was enabled to perform the most astonishing feats, and was honoured with the most signal victories : yet so careful is he to give the glory to God, that he repeats again and again, the same grateful acknowledgments, confessing God to be the sole author of his success, and ascribing to him the honour due unto his nameⁿ. Let it be remembered, that “our enemies still live and are mighty :” and therefore we must not boast as if the time were come for us to put off our armour^o. We need the same power to keep down our enemies, as to bring them down at first : we should soon fall a prey to the tempter, if left one moment to ourselves. Let our eyes therefore still be to Jesus, “the Author and the Finisher of our faith ;” depending on his mighty power for “strength according to our day^p,” and for the accomplishment of the promise which he hath given us, that “no weapon formed against us shall ever prosper^q.”

^g Isai. x. 4. This is a threatening ; but it may be applied to God’s friends *à fortiori*.

^h Josh. i. 6, 7, 9.

ⁱ Ps. xi. 1—4.

^k Ps. cxviii. 6—12.

^l Deut. vi. 10—12. and viii. 10, 11, 17, 18.

^m Isai. xxxvii. 24—29. Dan. iv. 30—32, 37.

ⁿ Ps. xviii. 29—42.

^o 1 Kings xx. 11.

^p Deut. xxxiii. 25.

^q Isai. liv. 17.

MMCXXVI.

THE MEANS OF WITHSTANDING SATAN'S WILES:

Eph. vi. 11. *Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

TO be possessed of courage is not the only requisite for a good soldier; he must be skilled in the use of arms; he must be acquainted with those stratagems which his adversaries will use for his destruction; he must know how to repel an assault, and how in his turn to assault his enemy: in short, he must be trained to war. Nor will his knowledge avail him any thing, unless he stand armed for the combat. Hence the Apostle, having encouraged the Christian soldier, and inspired him with confidence in "the Captain of his salvation," now calls him to put on his armour, and by a skilful use of it, to prepare for the day of battle.

To open fully the direction before us, we must shew you, first, *the wiles of the devil*; and next, *the means of defeating them*.

I. We shall endeavour to lay before you "the wiles of the devil"—

Satan is the great adversary of God and man; and labours to the uttermost to destroy the interests of both. In prosecuting his purpose, he has two grand objects in view, namely, *to lead men into sin*, and *to keep them from God*. We must consider these distinctly; and point out the stratagems he uses for the attainment of his ends.

1. *To lead men into sin*—

To effect this, he presents to them such *temptations* as are best suited to their natural dispositions. As a skilful general will not attempt to storm a fort on the side that it is impregnable, but will rather direct his efforts against the weaker parts, where he has a better prospect of success; so Satan considers the weak part of every man, and directs his artillery where he may most easily make a breach. He

well knew the covetous dispositions of Judas, and of Ananias and Sapphira: when therefore he wanted the one to betray his Master, and the others to bring discredit on the Christian name, he wrought upon their natural propensities, and instigated them with ease to the execution of his will^a. Thus he stimulates the proud or passionate, the lewd or covetous, the timid or melancholy, to such acts as are most congenial with their feelings, to the intent that his agency may be least discovered, and his purposes most effectually secured.

Much craft is also discoverable in *the seasons* which he chooses for making his assaults. If a general knew that his adversaries were harassed with fatigue, or revelling and intoxicated amidst the spoils of victory, or separated from the main body of their army, so that they could have no succour, he would not fail to take advantage of such circumstances, rather than attack them when they were in full force, and in a state of readiness for the combat. Such a general is Satan. If he finds us *in a state of great trouble* and perplexity, when the spirits are exhausted, the mind clouded, the strength enervated, then he will seek to draw us to murmuring or despair. Thus he acted towards Christ himself when he had been fasting forty days and forty nights; and again, on the eve of his crucifixion. The former of these occasions afforded him a favourable opportunity for tempting our blessed Lord to despondency^b, to presumption^c, to a total alienation of his heart from God^d: the latter inspired him with a hope of drawing our Lord to some act unworthy of his high character, and subversive of the ends for which he came into the world^e. Again, if we have been elevated with *peculiar joy*, he well knows how apt we are to relax our vigilance, and to indulge a carnal security. Hence, immediately on Paul's descent from the third heavens, the paradise of God, Satan strove to puff

^a John xiii. 2, 27. Acts v. 3.

^b Matt. iv. 2, 3.

^c Matt. iv. 6.

^d Matt. iv. 8, 9.

^e John xiv. 30. Luke xxii. 44, 53.

him up with pride^f, that so he might bring him into the condemnation of the devil^g. And with more success did he assault Peter immediately after the most exalted honour had been conferred upon him; whereby he brought upon the unguarded saint that just rebuke, "Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men^h." Above all, Satan is sure to embrace an opportunity *when we are alone*, withdrawn from those whose eye would intimidate, or whose counsel would restrain, us. He could not prevail on Lot, when in the midst of Sodom, to violate the rights of hospitality; but when he was in a retired cave, he too successfully tempted him to repeated acts of drunkenness and incest. And who amongst us has not found that seasons of privacy, or, at least, of seclusion from those who knew us, have been seasons of more than ordinary temptation?

The means which Satan uses in order to accomplish his purpose, will afford us a yet further insight into his wiles. Whom will a general so soon employ to betray the enemy into his hands, as one who by his power can command them, or by his professions can deceive them! And is it not thus with Satan? If he want to draw down the judgments of God upon the whole nation of the Jews, he will stir up David, in spite of all the expostulations of his courtiers, to number the peopleⁱ. If he would destroy Ahab, he becomes a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets, to persuade *him*, and by *him* to lead Jehoshaphat also and the combined armies into the most imminent peril^k. Would he have Job to curse his God? no fitter person to employ on this service than Job's own *wife*, whom he taught to give this counsel, "Curse God, and die^l." Would he prevail on Jesus

^f 2 Cor. xii. 7.

^g 1 Tim. iii. 6, 7.

^h Matt. xvi. 16—19, 22, 23.

ⁱ Numb. xxi. 1—4.

^k 1 Kings xxii. 21, 22. See the instance also of Elymas the sorcerer, who on account of his efforts is called "a child of the devil." Acts xiii. 10.

^l Job ii. 9.

to lay aside the thoughts of suffering for the sins of men? his *friend* Peter must offer him this advice, "Master, spare thyself^m." Thus in leading us to the commission of sin, he will use sometimes the authority of magistrates, of masters, or of parents, and sometimes the influence of our dearest friends or relatives. No instruments so fit for him, as those of a man's own householdⁿ.

There is also something further observable in *the manner* in which Satan tempts the soul. An able general will study to conceal the main object of his attack, and by feints to deceive his enemy^o. Thus does Satan form his attack with all imaginable cunning. His mode of beguiling Eve will serve as a specimen of his artifices in every age. He first only inquired whether any prohibition had been given her and her husband respecting the eating of the fruit of a particular tree; insinuating at the same time, that it was very improbable that God should impose upon them such an unnecessary restraint. Then, on being informed that the tasting of that fruit was forbidden, and that the penalty of death was to be inflicted on them in the event of their disobedience, he intimated, that such a consequence could never follow: that, on the contrary, the benefits which should arise to them from eating of that fruit were incalculable. In this manner he led her on, from parleying with him, to give him credit; and, from believing him, to comply with his solicitations^p. And thus it is that he acts towards *us*: he for a time conceals his full purpose: he pleads at first for nothing more than the gratification of the eye, the ear, the imagination; but is no sooner master of one fort, or station, than he plants his artillery there, and renews his assaults, till the whole soul has surrendered to his dominion.

2. The other grand device of Satan is, *to keep men from God*. If, after having yielded to his suggestions, the soul were to return to God with penitence and contrition, all Satan's wiles, how successful soever

^m Matt. xvi. 16—19, 22, 23.

^o Josh. viii. 5, 6, 15, 21.

ⁿ Matt. x. 36.

^p Gen. iii. 1—6.

they had before been, would be frustrated at once. The next labour therefore of our great adversary is, to secure his captive, that he may not escape out of his hands. The wiles he makes use of to accomplish this, come next under our consideration.

He will begin with *misrepresenting* to his captives *their own character*. One while he will insinuate that, though they may have transgressed in some smaller matters, yet they have never committed any great sin, and therefore have no need to disquiet themselves with apprehensions of God's wrath. If he cannot compose their minds in that way, he will suggest, that their iniquities have been so numerous, and so heinous, as to preclude all hope of forgiveness. He will endeavour to make them believe that they have been guilty of the unpardonable sin, or that their day of grace is passed; so that they may as well take their fill of present delights, since all attempts to secure eternal happiness will be fruitless. To such artifices as these our Lord refers, when he tells us, that the strong man armed keepeth his palace and his goods in peace^q.

Next he will misrepresent to his captives *the character of God*. He will impress them with the idea that God is too merciful to punish any one eternally for such trifling faults as theirs. Or, if that fail to lull them asleep, he will intimate, that the insulted Majesty of heaven demands vengeance: that the justice and holiness of the Deity would be dishonoured, if pardon were vouchsafed to such offenders as they. Probably too, he will suggest that God has not elected them; and that therefore they *must* perish, since they cannot alter his decrees, or save themselves without his aid. He will, as in his assaults upon our blessed Lord^r, bring the Scriptures themselves to countenance his lies; and, by a misapplication of difficult and detached passages, endeavour to hide from us the perfections of our God, as harmonizing and glorified in our redemption^s. It was

^q Luke xi. 21, 26.

^r Matt. iv. 6.

^s 2 Cor. iv. 4.

in this manner that he strove to discourage Joshua^t, and to detain David in his bonds^u: such advantage too he sought to take of the incestuous Corinthian^x: and, if this stratagem be not defeated, he will prevail over us to our eternal ruin.

But there is another stratagem which, for the subtilty of its texture, the frequency of its use, and its successfulness in destroying souls, deserves more especial notice. When effectual resistance has been made to the foregoing temptations, and in spite of all these misrepresentations, the sinner has attained a just view both of his own character, and of God's, then Satan has recourse to another wile, that promises indeed to the believer a speedy growth in the divine life, but is intended really to *divert him from all proper thoughts both of himself and of God*. He will "transform himself into an angel of light," and make use of some popular minister, or some talkative professor, as his agent in this business. He will by means of his emissaries draw the young convert to matters of doubtful disputation: he will perplex his mind with some intricate questions respecting matters of doctrine, or of discipline in the Church. He will either controvert, and explode acknowledged truths, or carry them to an extreme, turning spirituality to mysticism, or liberty to licentiousness. Having entangled him in this snare, he will puff him up with a conceit of his own superior attainments, and speedily turn him from the simplicity that is in Christ. Little do his agents, who appear to be "ministers of righteousness," imagine that they are really "ministers of the devil;" and little do they who are inveigled by them, consider "in what a snare they are taken:" but God himself, who sees all these secret transactions, and discerns their fatal tendency, has given us this very account, and thereby guarded us against this dangerous device^y.

Thus have we seen the *temptations* by which Satan leads men into sin, together with the *seasons*, the

^t Zech. iv. 1, 2.

^u Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.

^x 2 Cor. ii. 7, 11.

^y 2 Cor. xi. 3, 13—15.

means, and the *manner*, of his assaults. We have seen also how he keeps them from God, even *by misrepresenting to them their own character, and God's, or by diverting them from a due attention either to themselves or God.*

II. Let us now proceed in the second place to point out the means by which these wiles may be defeated—

This part of our subject will come again into discussion, both *generally*, in the next discourse, and *particularly*, when we treat of the various pieces of armour provided for us. Nevertheless we must distinctly, though briefly, shew in this place, *What we are to understand by the whole armour of God; and, How we are to put it on; and, In what way it will enable us to withstand the devil's wiles.*

Armour is of two kinds, defensive and offensive; the one to protect ourselves, the other to assail our enemy. Now God has provided for us every thing that is necessary for a successful maintenance of the Christian warfare. Is our head exposed to the assaults of Satan? there is “a helmet” to guard it. Is our heart liable to be pierced? there is a “breast-plate” to defend it. Are our feet subject to such wounds as may cause us to fall? there are “shoes,” or greaves, for their protection. Is our armour likely to be loosened? there is a “girdle” to keep it fast. Are there apertures, by which a well-aimed dart may find admission? there is a “shield,” which may be moved for the defence of every part, as occasion may require. Lastly, the Christian soldier is furnished with a sword also, by the skilful use of which he may inflict deadly wounds on his adversary.

But here it will be asked, How shall we get this armour? and, how shall we put it on? To obtain it, we must go to the armoury of heaven, and receive it from the hands of the Captain of our salvation. No creature in the universe can give it us. He, and he only, who formed it, can impart it to us. As, when God had decreed the destruction of Babylon,

we are told, that “the Lord opened his armoury, and brought forth the weapons of his indignation^z ;” so, when he has commissioned us to go forth against sin and Satan, he must supply us with the arms, whereby alone we can execute his will : and we must be daily going to him in prayer, that he would furnish us from head to foot, or rather, that he himself would be “our shield and buckler,” our almighty protector and deliverer^a.

When we have received our armour, then we are to “put it on.” It is not given us to look at, but to use : not to wear for amusement, but to gird on for actual service. We must examine it, to see that it is indeed of celestial temper, and that none is wanting. We must adjust it carefully in all its parts, that it may not be cumbersome and useless in the hour of need : and when we have clothed ourselves with it, then we must put forth our strength, and use it for the purposes for which it is designed.

Our more particular directions must be reserved, till we consider the use of each distinct part of this armour. We shall only add at present, that, if we thus go forth to the combat, we shall surely vanquish our subtle enemy. We say not, that he shall never wound us ; for the most watchful of us are sometimes off our guard ; and the most experienced of us sometimes deceived. But we can assure the whole army of Christians, that Satan shall never finally prevail against them^b. Their head shall be preserved from error^c ; their heart, from iniquity^d ; their feet, from falling^e.

What remains then but that we call on all of you to put on this armour ? Let not any imagine that they can stand without it : for, if Adam was vanquished even in Paradise, how much more shall *we* be overpowered ? If the perfect armour with which he was clad by nature, proved insufficient for the combat, how shall we stand, who are altogether

^z Jer. l. 25.

^b Matt. xvi. 18.

^d Rom. vi. 14.

^a Ps. lxxxiv. 11. and xviii. 2.

^c Isai. xxxv. 8

^e 1 Sam. ii. 9. 2 Pet. i. 10.

stripped of every defence! If Satan, while yet a novice in the art of tempting, “beguiled our first parents by his subtilty,” how much more will he beguile and ruin us, after so many thousand years of additional experience! Arise then, all of you, and gird yourselves for the combat. *Ye careless ones*, know that ye are already “led captive by the devil at his will^f,” and the more you think yourselves secure, the more you shew that you are the dupes of Satan’s wiles. *Ye weak and timid*, “be strong, fear not; hath not God commanded you? Be strong, and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you, whithersoever ye go^g.” Only go forth in dependence upon God, and “no weapon that is formed against you shall ever prosper^h.” But take care that you have on the *whole* armour of God. In vain will be the use of *any*, if *the whole* be not used. *One* part left unprotected will prove as fatal, as if you were exposed in *every* part. But if you follow this counsel, you may defy all the hosts of hell: for “the weakest of you shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as Godⁱ.”

^f 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^h Isai. liv. 17.

^g Josh. i. 6, 9.

ⁱ Zech. xii. 8.

MMCXXVII.

TO WITHSTAND THE POWER OF SATAN.

Eph. vi. 12, 13. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

IN persuading men to undertake any arduous office, and more especially to enlist into the army, it is customary to keep out of view, as much as possible, the difficulties and dangers they will be exposed to, and to allure them by prospects of pleasure, honour,

or emolument. It was far otherwise with Christ and his Apostles. When our Lord invited men to enlist under his banners, he told them that they would have to enter on a course of pain and self-denial; "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Thus St. Paul, at the very time that he is endeavouring to recruit the Christian army, tells us plainly, that the enemies we shall have to combat, are the most subtle and powerful of any in the universe. Deceit and violence, the two great engines of cruelty and oppression, are their daily practice and delight.

In conformity with the Apostle's plan, we have opened to you, in some measure, the *wiles* of that adversary, whom we are exhorting you to oppose: and we shall now proceed to set before you somewhat of his *power*; still however encouraging you not to be dismayed, but to go forth against him with an assurance of victory.

We shall shew you,

I. What a powerful adversary we have to contend with—

As soon as any man enlists under the banners of Christ, the world will turn against him, even as the kings of Canaan did against the Gibeonites, the very instant they had made a league with Joshua^a. "Those of his own household will most probably be his greatest foes." To oppose these manfully is no easy task: but yet *these* are of no consideration in comparison of our other enemies; "We wrestle not against flesh and blood^b," says the Apostle, but "against all the principalities and powers" of hell^c.

^a Josh. x. 4, with John xv. 18, 19.

^b The terms "flesh and blood" are sometimes used to signify any human being, (Matt. xvi. 17.) and sometimes, our *corrupt* nature, whether intellectual (Gal. i. 16.) or corporeal, (1 Cor. xv. 50.) Here they denote the world at large.

^c Commentators labour exceedingly, but in vain, to make any tolerable sense of ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις as translated in our version. But if they were construed with ἡ πάλη, thus, "Our conflict about heavenly things," and τὰ πνευματικά τῆς πορνείας be considered as equivalent to πορνῶν πνεύματα, the whole sense would be clear and

It is not merely in a rhetorical way that the Apostle accumulates so many expressions, to designate our enemies: the different terms he uses are well calculated to exhibit their power; which will appear to us great indeed, if we consider what he intimates respecting their *nature*, their *number*, and their *office*.

With respect to *their nature*, they are “wicked spirits.” Once they were bright angels around the throne of God: but “they kept not their first estate;” and therefore they were “cast down to hell^d.” But though they have lost the holiness, they still retain, the power, of angels. As “angels, they excel in strength^e,” and are far “greater in power and might^f” than any human being. They have, moreover, an immense advantage over us, in that they are spirits. Were they flesh and blood like ourselves, we might see them approaching, and either flee from them, or fortify ourselves against them: at least, there would be some time when, through weariness, they must intermit their efforts: but being spirits their approaches to us are invisible, irresistible, incessant.

Their number is also intimated, in that they are represented as “principalities and powers,” consisting of multitudes who hold, like men on earth and angels in heaven^g, various degrees of honour and authority under one head. To form a conjecture respecting their numbers, would be absurd; since we are totally in the dark on that subject. This however we know, that they are exceeding many; because our Lord cast no less than seven out of one woman^h; and one man was possessed by a whole troop or “legion” at onceⁱ. We have reason there-

unembarrassed. For that sense of *ἐν*, see Rom. xi. 2. and Gal. i. 24; and, for a much greater separation of words that are to be construed together, see Rom. ii. 12, 16. Indeed, the distance between *ἡ πάλῃ* and *ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις* is not worthy of notice, if it be considered, that four of the intermediate members of the sentence are a mere accumulation of synonymous expressions, a periphrasis for *πονηρὰ πνεύματα*.

^d Jude, ver. 6. and 2 Pet. ii. 4.

^e Ps. ciii. 20.

^f 2 Pet. ii. 11. ^g Col. i. 16. ^h Mark xvi. 9. ⁱ Mark v. 9.

fore to think that their number far exceeds that of the human species; because there is no human being beyond the reach of their assaults, no, not for a single hour. Nor are they formidable merely on account of their number, but principally on account of their union, and subordination under one leader. We read of “the devil and *his* angels^k,” as of a king and *his* subjects: and though we know not what precise ranks and orders there may be among them, we know the name of their chief, even “Beelzebub, the prince of the devils^l.” It is because of their acting thus in concert with each other, that they are so often spoken of as *one*^m: and well they may be; for, the whole multitude of them are so perfectly *one* in operation and design, that, if one spy out an advantage, he may in an instant have a legion more to second his endeavours: and as this constitutes the strength of armies on earth, so does it give tenfold power to our spiritual enemies.

The office which they execute as “the rulers of this dark world,” may serve yet further to give us an idea of their strength. It is true, this office was not delegated to them, but usurped by them: still however, they retain it by God’s permission, and exercise it to our cost. Satan is expressly called, “the prince of this worldⁿ,” “the god of this world^o,” “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in all the children of disobedience^p.” He “blinds them” that they may not see^q, and then, as the prophet led the Syrians, he leads them whithersoever he will^r; he takes them captive altogether^s. A few indeed who are brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel, have cast off his yoke: but except them, the whole world, enveloped in worse than Egyptian darkness, lieth under him as its universal monarch^t. The very elements are under

^k Matt. xxv. 41. ^l Matt. xii. 24. ^m Luke iv. 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 13.

ⁿ John xii. 31. and xiv. 30. and xvi. 11. ^o 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^p Eph. ii. 2. ^q 2 Cor. iv. 4. ^r 2 Kings vi. 18—20.

^s 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^t 1 John v. 19. Ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ, *in the wicked one.*

his controul, and concur with men and devils to fulfil his will. Would he deprive Job of his substance? hosts of Sabeans and Chaldeans come at his call, to plunder him^u. Would he destroy all his family? the wind rises at his command to smite their house, and overwhelm them in its ruins^x.

Such are the enemies with whom we have to contend. If we desire to prosecute earthly things, we can go on with ease; we can follow them without interruption from day to day, and from year to year: with respect to these things, the devils would rather help us forward, than obstruct our way. But the very instant we begin to seek "heavenly things," all hell is in alarm, just as all the Canaanites were, when they understood that Joshua's spies had been seen in their land^y. If we begin to listen to the word of God, he will send some emissary, some child of his, whom he has endued with peculiar subtilty, to turn us from the faith^z. If the word, like good seed, be sown upon our hearts, he will send a host of devils, like birds of the air, to pick up the seed^a. If any, in spite of his efforts, take root in our hearts, he will instantly sow tares to grow up with the wheat^b, and thorns to choke it^c. We cannot go into the presence of God to pray, but "Satan will be at our right hand to resist us^d." The conflict we have to maintain with him, is not like that which is common to our armies, where a part bear the brunt of the battle, and the rest are reserved for exigencies: in this view it is more properly compared to "*a wrestling*," where every man meets his antagonist, and must continue the contest, till the fall of one party decides the victory. Such the Scripture describes our contest to be; and such it is proved to be by every man's experience: there is no man who, if he will only observe the ease with which he enters upon his worldly calling, and keeps up his attention to it, and the comparative difficulty he finds, as soon as ever

^u Job i. 12, 15, 17.

^x Job i. 19.

^y Josh. ii. 9, 11.

^z Acts xiii. 7—10.

^a Matt. xiii. 4, 19.

^b Matt. xiii. 25.

^c Matt. xiii. 7, 22.

^d Zech. iii. 1.

he addresses himself to the concerns of his soul, shall not see, that there is in him an impotence and reluctance, for which he cannot account, unless he acknowledge, what the Scripture so fully warns him of, a satanic agency.

But shall we be intimidated by this account, and induced to surrender ourselves to Satan without a conflict? No. Formidable as he is, there is **ONE** above him, who circumscribes his powers, and *limits his operations*. He did, by God's permission, "cast *some* of the Ephesian church into *prison*, that they might be *tried*, for *ten days*:" but, if he could have accomplished all that was in his heart, he would have cast them *all* into *hell* that they might *perish* for *ever*. So far from being irresistible, he may be resisted, yea, and vanquished too, by the weakest of God's saints.

To encourage you therefore to fight against him, we will shew,

II. How we may effectually withstand him—

The Apostle renews, though with some variation, the directions he gave before; "not thinking it grievous to himself to repeat any thing that may conduce to our safety^f." St. Peter also was "careful to put Christians frequently in remembrance of many things, notwithstanding they knew them, and were established in the present truth^g." Well therefore may we call your attention once more to the exhortation in the text. Indeed, if the putting on the whole armour of God was necessary to guard against the *wiles* of the devil, it can be no less necessary as a preservative against his *power*: and the exhortation *enforced by this new consideration*, cannot reasonably be thought an uninteresting repetition.

But we shall have no need to repeat any former observations, seeing that what is new in the exhortation, will afford abundant matter for profitable, and seasonable, remark.

^e Rev. ii. 10.

^f Phil. iii. 1.

^g 2 Pet. i. 12.

The time mentioned in the text as “the evil day,” refers to those particular periods when Satan makes his most desperate attacks. Sometimes he retires from us for a season, as he did from our Lord^h; or, at least, gives us somewhat of a respite from any violent assaults. But he watches his opportunity to renew his efforts, when by bringing a host of devils to his aidⁱ, or finding us off our guard^k, he may exert his power to more effect. Such a season was *that* wherein David complained, that “his enemies, compassing him like bees, thrust sore at him that he might fall^l,” and especially *that* wherein the Lord Jesus Christ himself was so weakened by him, as to need an angel from heaven to administer strength and consolation^m. All who know any thing of “Satan’s devices,” must have noticed this in their own experience: there have been times when the enemy appeared unmindful of his work, and other times when “he has come in like a flood; so that if the Spirit of the Lord had not lifted up a standard against himⁿ,” he must have utterly overwhelmed them. The hour of death is a season when he usually puts forth all his power, “having great wrath because his time is short^o.”

Now what shall we do in such seasons, if not clad in the whole armour of God? What hope can we have of withstanding such an enemy? If he should find us unarmed, would he not sift us as wheat^p, and reduce us to mere chaff? Would he not scatter us as smoke out of the chimney, or chaff driven by a whirlwind^q? Would he not precipitate thousands of us, as he did the swine, into instantaneous destruction^r, and into the bottomless abyss of hell?

But if we be armed with the divine panoply, we need not fear; he can have no power against us any further than it is given him from above^s: and, “howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart

^h Luke iv. 13.ⁱ Matt. xii. 44, 45.^k 1 Pet. v. 8.^l Ps. cxviii. 12, 13.^m Luke xxii. 43, 53.ⁿ Isai. lix. 19.^o Rev. xii. 12.^p Luke xxii. 31.^q Hos. xiii. 3.^r Matt. viii. 31, 32.^s John xix. 11.

think so^t," his efforts against us shall ultimately conduce to our good, to make us more humble, more vigilant, more expert.

This is particularly intimated in the text; and in *this* the encouragement given us exceeds what was contained in the former exhortation. *There* we were taught to expect that we should not be vanquished by our subtle enemy: *here* we are encouraged with an assurance, that we shall not only effectually withstand his efforts, even when they are most desperate, but shall "*stand*" as victors on the field of battle, after having put our enemies to flight. To this also agree the words of St. James; "resist the devil, and he shall *flee* from you^u;" he shall not only not overcome you, but shall be so intimidated by your prowess as to flee from you with the greatest precipitation. Blessed truth! This mighty fiend, who dared to enter the lists with an archangel^x, and to contend even with the Son of God himself, shall be so terrified at the sight of a Christian champion, as not only to "forbear touching him^y," but even to flee from his presence as for his very life.

It is true, he will never finally give over the contest, till we are got entirely beyond his reach: nor is he at any time so vanquished or intimidated but that he will number another host, like unto that which has been defeated, and renew his attack upon us^z: but his malice shall terminate in his own confusion^a: he may succeed to bruise our heel, but we shall ultimately bruise his head^b. "Our weapons, *through God*, shall be mighty, though wielded by the feeblest arm^c." We shall "go on conquering and to conquer^d" till we set our feet upon his neck^e, and return with triumphant exultation from the combat, saying, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name^f."

^t Isai. x. 5, 7. ^u Jam. iv. 7.

^x Jude, ver. 9.

^y 1 John v. 18. ^z 1 Kings xx. 22—26. ^a 1 Kings xx. 27—29.

^b Gen. iii. 15. ^c 2 Cor. x. 4.

^d Rev. vi. 2.

^e Josh. x. 24. This was altogether typical of the Christian's victories.

^f Luke x. 17.

Nor is this your greatest encouragement: for as soon as you have “done all” that God has designed for you in this state of warfare, you shall “*stand*” before God, united to that noble army that are now enjoying their triumphs in his presence. Having “fought the good fight and finished your course, there shall be given to you a crown of righteousness” and glory^g; and you shall bear the palm of victory in the courts of heaven^h. Then shall be fulfilled to you what was spoken by our Lord, “To him that overcometh will I give to sit down with me upon my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father upon his throneⁱ.” Only “be faithful unto death; and God will give thee a crown of life^k.”

Before we dismiss this subject, we would ADDRESS a few words,

1. *To those who have never yet wrestled with this great adversary—*

We hope you are now convinced, that it is not a *needless* labour to engage in this contest. But you may still be induced to decline it, from the idea that it is a hopeless work. But know this, that you have undertaken a task which is infinitely more difficult than this; for, while you refuse to wrestle with Satan, you are actually wrestling with God himself. He who infallibly discerns, and rightly estimates, your conduct, says, that ye “resist the Holy Ghost^l” and “contend with your Maker^m,” and your own consciences will inform you, that you have often “fought against God,” by resisting the influence of his word and Spiritⁿ. Suppose then ye gain the victory (which is but too probable), suppose God give up the contest, and say, “My Spirit shall strive with him no longer^o,” what will ye have to boast of? what cause will ye have for joy? Awful will be

^g 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

^h Rev. vii. 9, 10.

ⁱ Rev. iii. 21.

^k Rev. ii. 10. latter part.

^l Acts vii. 51.

^m Job xl. 2.

ⁿ Acts v. 39. and xxiii. 9.

^o Gen. vi. 3.

that day wherein God shall say, "Let him alone^p:" from that hour your condemnation will be sure, and Satan will have perfectly gained his point. Judge then whether it be not better to contend with Satan, than with God? with him whom you are sure to conquer, to your eternal happiness, than with him, by whose avenging arm you must be crushed for ever^q? Consider well which of the two ye choose for your enemy, God or Satan: and may God incline you to enlist under the Redeemer's banner, and in his strength to combat all the enemies of your salvation!

2. Let us speak to *those who have begun the arduous contest.*

Be not afraid of your great adversary. Do not be like the unbelieving Israelites, who, because the Anakims were of such extraordinary stature, and dwelt in cities that were walled up to heaven, dreaded to go up against them^r; but rather say, with Caleb, "They shall be bread for us^s:" instead of destroying, they shall be an occasion of good to, our souls: their spoils shall enrich us; and the opposition that they make shall only be the means of displaying more abundantly the love and faithfulness of our God. "Take unto you" again and again "the whole armour of God;" and "fight, not as one that beateth the air^t," but as one that is determined to conquer or die: and if at any time you be tempted to give up the contest, think of "those who now through faith and patience inherit the promises^u." Once *they* were conflicting like you; but now they rest from their labours, and are anxious spectators of your conflicts^x. It is but a little time, and you also shall be numbered with them. "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world^y." Only go forth therefore in the name of Christ; and *his* triumphs shall be the pattern, the pledge, the earnest of your own.

^p Hos. iv. 17.

^q Isai. xxvii. 4.

^r Numb. xiii. 28, 31, 33.

^s Numb. xiii. 9, 30.

^t 1 Cor. ix. 26.

^u Heb. vi. 12.

^x Heb. xii. 1.

^y 1 John iv. 4.

MMCXXVIII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S GIRDLE.

Eph. vi. 14. *Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.*

IT is not possible to exceed in magnifying the grace of God: to *it* must every part of our salvation be ascribed: grace begins the work in our hearts; grace carries it on; grace completes it. No ground of glorying is left for man: his own wisdom, goodness, strength, weigh no more than the small dust upon the balance. All is the work of God; he lays the foundation; and when “the head-stone shall be brought forth with shoutings, we must cry, Grace, grace unto it^a.” But while we are jealous of God’s honour, and desirous of magnifying the riches of his grace, we must be careful not to undervalue the work wrought in our hearts. In point of *merit*, there is nothing in us that is worthy of the smallest consideration: but in a variety of other views, the work of God’s Spirit in our hearts can scarcely be appreciated too highly. This is manifest from the description which the Apostle gives of the Christian’s armour. He is careful in the first place to shew us, that we have not in ourselves any *inherent* strength; and that, consequently, we must depend entirely on God: but in entering more minutely into his subject, he declares, that those graces, which the Spirit of God forms in our hearts, are means of defence against our spiritual adversaries: for though as being *our* graces, they are weak and worthless, yet as being *the work of God’s hands*, they are of great strength and value: they even constitute that armour, in which we are to go forth against the enemies of our salvation, and by which we shall be enabled to defeat all their wiles, and all their power.

The first grace that he mentions, is “truth:” in elucidating which we shall shew,

^a Zech. iv. 6, 7, 9.

I. What we are to understand by truth—

II. Its use and office in the Christian warfare—

I. What are we to understand by “truth?”

It is a term of extensive signification. It is sometimes put for the Gospel; in which sense the Apostle speaks of “obeying the truth.” But in this place, it rather means *sincerity*. The two terms are often used together as synonymous expressions; “Serve the Lord,” says Joshua in his farewell discourse, “in sincerity and truth^b,” and St. Paul exhorts us to “keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth^c.”

But sincerity, Christian sincerity, is very little understood. For the most part, it is considered as importing nothing more than a good intention, without any reference to the manner in which that good intention operates. But the sincerity, of which the text speaks, is a Christian grace; and consequently it must include something widely different from that which may be exercised by superstitious bigots^d, or blood-thirsty persecutors^e.

To mark it as distinctly as possible, we shall notice *four* things that are implied in it:

First, it implies *a desire and intention to please God*. There is one canon, one universal rule of action, prescribed to us in the Scriptures; namely, that “whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we should do all to the glory of God^f.” Whatever therefore springs from other motives and principles, must argue a want of sincerity, in proportion as God’s honour is superseded by any selfish considerations. When Jehu, in compliance with God’s command, extirpated the family of Ahab^g, his obedience was not considered as sincere, because he was actuated rather by vain-glory^h, than by a real desire to please God; and the blood that he shed in executing the divine command,

^b Josh. xxiv. 14.

^c 1 Cor. v. 8.

^d Rom. x. 2.

^e John. xvi. 2.

^f 1 Cor. x. 31.

^g 2 Kings ix. 6, 7.

^h 2 Kings x. 16.

was on that very account avenged by God himself upon his posterityⁱ.

The Jews also complied with the institutions of Moses in observing their religious fasts and feasts: but because “they did fast and feast unto themselves rather than unto God,” and sought rather to cover their own enormities by such observances, than really to honour God, their services were deemed hypocritical, and were rejected with abhorrence^k. Thus must all our duties, civil or religious, have respect to God: we must have “a single eye,” if we would please him^l. If we bring forth fruit to ourselves only, “we are empty vines,” we are unprofitable servants^m.

Sincerity implies in the next place, *a serving of God according to the light we enjoy*. Sincerity will doubtless consist with defective views both of Christian duty, and Christian liberty: but it will not consist with allowed deviations from an acknowledged duty, either in a way of omission, or of commission. “The wisdom that is from above, is without partiality, and without hypocrisyⁿ.” To be “partial in the law” is to dissemble with God: and whether we make outward duties a cloak for inward lusts, or present to God a mere “form of godliness without the power of it,” we are really “hypocrites in heart^o,” and therefore can have no pretensions to sincerity.

But there is yet a third thing, which is absolutely essential to sincerity, namely, *a desire to know the will of God more perfectly*. Here it is that many, who have appeared most sincere, have failed. St. Paul before his conversion “thought he *ought* to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus^p,” and truly he did them with a zeal suited to his persuasion. But can it be said, that at that time he possessed the Christian virtue of sincerity? By no means: for he had opportunities enough of information: the writings of Moses and the prophets were plain enough to

ⁱ Hos. i. 4.^k Zech. vii. 5, 6.^l Matt. vi. 22, 23.^m Hos. x. 1.ⁿ Jam. iii. 17.^o Matt. xxiii. 23—28, and xv. 7, 8.^p Acts xxvi. 9.

convince any man that was not blinded by prejudice, and carried away by his own impetuous passions^q. Besides, he might have gone to the fountain head, and inquired of Jesus himself, what grounds there were for believing him to be the Messiah. Above all, he lived when the Gospel was preached in all its purity, and attested from heaven by miracles without number. Why then did he not set himself to inquire more candidly? Why did he not, like the Beræans, search the Scriptures, to see if things were as the Apostles declared them to be^r? But this would not agree with his infuriated zeal: he hated the light, and therefore sought to the uttermost to extinguish it. How different was the conduct of Nathanael! He participated in the prejudices of his countrymen; and hastily concluded that “no good thing could come out of Galilee.” But when he was desired to “come and see” for himself, he availed himself of the opportunity to form his judgment on surer grounds; and, on the very first demonstration which our Lord gave of his Messiahship, he believed in Jesus; and thereby evidenced his right to that title which our Lord had given him, “an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile^s.”

There is one thing more implied in sincerity, namely, *a determination to serve God without any regard to consequences*. Our duty to God is paramount to every other consideration. When we know what he requires of us, we are not to be diverted from it by any losses or any sufferings. Who does not see the insincerity of those who believed in Christ, but were afraid to confess him^t; and of that amiable youth who turned back from Christ rather than part with his possessions^u? If we be truly upright in heart, we shall say as St. Paul when he was solicited to shun the trials and afflictions which, as the Spirit testified, awaited him in every city; “I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus^x.” And if

^q Luke xvi. 31.^r Acts xvii. 11.^s John i. 45—49.^t John xii. 42, 43.^u Mark x. 21, 22.^x Acts xxi. 13.

the trials be ever so severe, we shall still “hold fast our integrity^y,” and adopt the language of the same Apostle; “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and fulfil my duty to my God^z.”

This representation of “*truth*” is both illustrated and confirmed by the conduct of St. Paul on his first conversion to God. Till that hour, he had been walking blindly “after the course of this world,” and “in the way of his own heart:” but as soon as his eyes were opened, even before he had any clear knowledge of Christianity, he desired to know, and determined to execute, the whole will of God: “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do^a?” ‘Thou needest only to shew me wherein I am wrong, and to teach me thy way, and I will instantly, through thy assistance, change my conduct, and devote myself to thy service: nor shall any considerations of hope or fear, ever turn me from the path prescribed by thee.’ Nor was this a vain boast; for “he conferred not with flesh and blood,” but set himself without delay to “preach the faith which he had laboured to destroy^b,” and persisted in preaching it even unto death.

The nature of “*truth*” being thus ascertained, let us proceed to shew,

II. Its use and office in the Christian warfare—

Among the various parts of a soldier’s armour, a “girdle” was of very principal importance; and in this view it is frequently mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. The prophet, describing the irresistible fury with which the Chaldeans should overrun Palestine, says, none shall be weary or stumble among them, none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall *the girdle of their loins* be loosed^c. And our blessed Lord, who, as the Captain of our salvation, was

^y Job xxviii. 5, 6.

^z Acts xx. 24.

^a Acts ix. 6.

^b Gal. i. 15, 16, 23.

^c Isai. v. 27.

arrayed like all the soldiers of his army, is represented by the same prophet as habited in this manner; “Righteousness shall be *the girdle of his loins*, and faithfulness *the girdle of his reins*^d.”

The use of the girdle was *to keep the armour compact*, and *to strengthen the loins*. And these are the offices which “truth” performs for the Christian soldier.

In the first place, *it compacts all the graces with which his soul is armed*. As the different parts of armour with which the body is fortified, would hang loose, and leave many apertures through which a wound might be inflicted, if they were not fastened together by a belt or girdle, so would the Christian's graces prove insufficient for his defence, if they were not all compacted together by the girdle of sincerity. Let us look at persons that seemed armed from head to foot, and prepared to defy all the powers of darkness. See Johanan, and the remnant of the Jews whom the Chaldeans had not taken into captivity, coming to the prophet, entreating him to ask counsel for them from God; and vowing in the most solemn manner to comply with any direction which the Lord should give them by his mouth. We have not a more hopeful appearance in all the sacred records. But they dissembled with God: no sooner was the answer given them, than they shewed by their conduct, that they were not sincere in their overtures; and they speedily became the victims of their own hypocrisy^e. And how often are similar failures found amongst ourselves, from the very same cause! How many appear penitent and determined to serve their God, while they are under some heavy calamity, or in the near prospect of death; and yet discover their hypocrisy, as soon as ever their professions are brought to the test! Yet daily is that account of the Jews realized amongst ourselves; “When he slew them, then they sought him, and inquired early after God, and remembered that God was their

^d Isai. xi. 5.

^e Jer. xlii. 1—6, 19—22.

Rock, the high God their Redeemer; nevertheless they did but flatter him with their mouth, and lie unto him with their tongues; for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant^f.”

On the other hand, how impenetrable to the darts of the adversary were the graces of those who were sincere before God! Daniel not only would not relinquish, but would not so much as abate, or conceal, his devotions, though menaced with a cruel and speedy death^g. Nor would the Hebrew Youths comply with the edict of a haughty monarch, though they saw a furnace heated for their destruction, and might have pleaded in their defence the example of a whole nation^h. Thus shall we also be enabled to brave every danger, and to endure death in its most awful forms, if our hearts be upright before God. As all our graces will be compacted together by sincerity, so every distinct grace will derive from it tenfold solidity, and strength: let our “faith be unfeigned,” our “love without dissimulation,” and our “spirit altogether without guile,” and we need fear no assaults, however artful, however violent.

The other office of truth is, *to strengthen our souls under great and long-continued conflicts*. This particular use of the girdle is repeatedly mentioned by the Psalmist. In reference to himself, he says, “Thou hast *girded me with strength* unto the battleⁱ.” In reference to the Messiah also he uses a similar expression: “The Lord reigneth; he is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with *strength, wherewith he hath girded himself*^k.”

“Those who have a divided heart, will assuredly be found faulty at the last^l.” Numberless are the instances wherein persons who have fought well for a season, have fainted at last through this sad defect. But we will mention only two; one, wherein the failure had nearly terminated in the destruction of many; and the other, wherein it involved one of the

^f Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.

^g Dan. vi. 10.

^h Dan. iii. 17, 18.

ⁱ Ps. xviii. 39.

^k Ps. xciii. 1.

^l Hos. x. 2.

most eminent professors in utter and everlasting ruin. For the former instance we will refer you, not to a man professedly ungodly, no, nor to a mere novice in religion, but to the most distinguished of all the Apostles. With the name of Peter we associate the idea of courage undaunted, and of piety irreproachable. But behold him on one occasion, when his loins were loosed, and the girdle was wanting to complete his armour. This valiant hero, who had acquitted himself so nobly in many battles, was at last, through fear of offending the Judaizing Christians, guilty of the basest dissimulation; undermining by his influence the most essential doctrine of that Gospel which he was sent to preach; and, by his example, drawing Barnabas also, and a multitude of others, into the most fatal error. And, if St. Paul had not openly rebuked him before all the Church, and thereby counteracted the effect of his misconduct, it is not possible to say, how far his error might have affected the eternal interests of millions^m.

In the other instance, we must turn our eyes to one, whose eminence drew from St. Paul himself repeated commendations, even such as were bestowed on the Evangelist, St. Luke. After years of manly toil, and continued danger, Demas was left to prove how weak the strongest are without sincerity. Wearied with his conflicts, he sought repose in the bosom of the worldⁿ; when, if he had fought with more sincerity, he might have endured to the end, and triumphed over all his adversaries. Unhappy man, to retain one secret lust, which, like a canker, ate out his vitals, or, like a leak unnoticed, sank the vessel wherein he was embarked! But thus it will be with all whose loins are not girt about with truth: "a double-minded man will be unstable in all his ways^o."

But if we have melancholy instances of failure through the want of this virtue, we have many noble

^m Gal. ii. 11—14. "*to be blamed—dissembled—dissimulation—walked not uprightly.*"

ⁿ Compare Col. iv. 14. and Philem. ver. 24. with 2 Tim. iv. 10.

^o Jam. i. 8.

instances of persevering zeal in others, whose hearts were right with God. Behold the patriarchs sojourning for years in a strange land, when “they had opportunities enough of returning to their native country,” if they had been so minded: but they were sincere in “seeking a better country, that is, an heavenly;” and therefore they willingly lived as “strangers and pilgrims on the earth^p.” Behold also the noble army of martyrs, who “out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens;” yea, and women also, who, notwithstanding their natural weakness and timidity, would “not accept deliverance from their tortures, that they might obtain a better resurrection^q.” Indeed, where is there one who is truly upright before God, who has not frequently evinced a strength and steadfastness superior to the efforts of unassisted nature? Who has not been called to make many sacrifices of pleasure, honour, interest; and to lead a life of continual self-denial, both in the mortifying of inward lusts, and the enduring of outward persecutions? But, “having set his hand to the plough, the Christian will not look back,” and having put on his armour, he will not put it off but with his life.

The vast importance of truth and sincerity being made apparent, let the following ADVICE be duly weighed:

1. Let us inquire whether we possess this part of Christian armour—

Perhaps there is scarcely any one who does not fancy himself sincere. But can we appeal to God that our daily aim is to please *him*, yea, to please him, not only in preference to ourselves or others, but in direct opposition to the whole world? Do we labour to approve ourselves to him, forbearing every sinful thing, and doing every thing we know to be right? Do we search the Scriptures daily, and attend

^p Heb. xi. 15, 16.

^q Heb. xi. 34, 35.

on the ministration of God's word, on purpose that we may have our sentiments and conduct more entirely conformed to the will of God? And finally, do we disregard the scoffs of an ungodly world, and determine to sacrifice even life itself, rather than violate the dictates of our conscience? *This* is sincerity, *this* is truth. Doubtless there are infirmities in the best of men; and consequently there will be occasional deviations from the path of duty: but if we be sincere, we shall not *allow* any sin whatever: we shall endeavour to be "pure as God is pure, and perfect as God is perfect." O that there were in all of us such a heart as this!

2. Let us be on our guard against those devices, whereby Satan would weaken our sincerity, or rob us of the comfort of it—

Satan will put forth all his wiles, and exert all his power, to loosen this girdle. He well knows, that, if he succeed in this point, all the rest will be easy: but that till this be effected, we are invulnerable. He will therefore try on all occasions to get advantage against us. He will cover his endeavours with the most specious pretexts, and present his temptations in the most alluring shapes. But let us watch against him: let not the example of an Apostle, or the preaching of an angel^r, lead us to renounce one single truth, or to transgress one single precept. If we be not continually on our guard, that "serpent will beguile us:" yea, in spite of all our watchfulness will he deceive us, if we be not preserved by God himself. Let us therefore "watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation."

But, if Satan cannot entice us to lay aside our girdle, he will endeavour to deprive us of the comfort of it. He will take occasion from our remaining infirmities to make us think ourselves hypocrites: and thus he will seek to effect that through despondency, which he could not effect through any other temptations. Let it then be our daily care so

^r Gal. i. 8, 9.

to fasten this girdle round our loins, that we may have in ourselves, and give to all around us, an indisputable evidence that we both possess and improve it. Then shall we have a consolation arising from it, and “rejoice in the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have our conversation in the world^s.”

Lastly, let us “*stand*” thus armed, and be in constant readiness to oppose our enemy. Let us not fear him, but resist him manfully. If we fight, we have nothing to fear: it is only when we turn our back, that we are left exposed to any mortal injury: in every other part we are armed sufficiently for our defence. Let us then beg of God to “put truth in our inward parts^t.” Let us “add to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness and charity, and keep them all compact with the girdle of truth; then have we God’s promise, that we shall never fallⁿ.” Through his grace, our “integrity and uprightness shall preserve us^x.” Let us therefore “gird up the loins of our mind, and be sober, and hope to the end^y.” Only let us “be sincere; and we shall be without offence till the day of Christ^z.”

^s 2 Cor. i. 12.

^t Ps. li. 6.

^u 2 Pet. i. 5—8, 10.

^x Ps. xxv. 21.

^y 1 Pet. i. 13.

^z Phil. i. 10.

MMCXXIX.

THE CHRISTIAN’S BREAST-PLATE.

Eph. vi. 14. *Stand having on the breast-plate of righteousness.*

AS various parts of armour, however differing in shape, may be formed of the same materials, so amongst the Christian graces, there may exist a considerable resemblance, while yet there remains between them a manifest distinction. Righteousness is that particular grace which comes under our consideration at this time. By “righteousness” we understand, that *true* and universal *holiness*, which is characteristic of conversion, and constitutes that

divine image, after which we are renewed^a. Now this, though nearly allied to sincerity, differs materially from it: sincerity relates to the aims and motives of a person; but righteousness to his actions and habits. Righteousness is that in actual attainment, which sincerity is in desire and purpose. Righteousness cannot exist without sincerity; but sincerity may, and often does, exist without righteousness; because (as was shewn in the preceding discourse) it may be found in blind zealots, and bloody persecutors.

The piece of armour to which righteousness is compared, is “the breast-plate;” which was of use to defend the vitals from the assaults of an enemy. Of such importance was it to every one in the time of battle, that all, from the general to the soldier, were clad with it: nor can its importance to *us* more strongly appear, than from the consideration, that the Captain of our salvation, even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, was thus arrayed. The Prophet Isaiah, speaking expressly of him, says, “He put on righteousness as a breast-plate^b.”

In the metaphor before us, the Apostle intimates, that without righteousness we should be exposed to imminent peril, yea, to certain death: but that, if we be clad with righteousness, our adversaries will never be able to prevail against us. It is evident therefore that there are two points to be considered by us; namely, *the necessity* of righteousness for our defence, and *its sufficiency* to protect us:

I. The *necessity* of righteousness—

In order to destroy us, our great adversary uses both deceit and violence; against both of which it becomes us to be armed, in order that we may *discover the one*, and *repel the other*.

Righteousness then is necessary in the first place, that we may *discover his wiles*.

It is said with truth by an inspired writer, that “the god of this world blinds the eyes of them that

^a Eph. iv. 23, 24.

^b Isai. lix. 17.

believe not^c:" and it is astonishing to what a degree he deludes their souls. He instigates them to the commission of sin under the idea that it is at least excusable, if not altogether justifiable and right^d. He teaches them to "call evil good and good evil; to put darkness for light, and light for darkness, bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter^e." We may see one man carried on by ostentation and vanity, while he thinks himself actuated by zeal for God^f. Another yields to a vindictive spirit, yet supposes that he is only maintaining a just regard for his own character, or perhaps for the rights of the community^g. Through the agency of that subtle fiend, covetousness assumes the name of prudence^h; prodigality is nothing but a commendable excess of generosity: yea, the most cruel machinations of bigotry, are deemed a service well-pleasing to Godⁱ. Who has not noticed in others this sad infatuation? Who has not seen his neighbours acting under the influence of a bad principle, while they were at the same time as strongly persuaded that they were right, as if there were no room for doubt? Thus it is more or less with every unrenewed person; and too often with those also who are yet weak in the faith; they go on, "not knowing what spirit they are of." In vain do ministers set forth the evil of such a state: in vain do they discriminate, and mark the difference between truth and error: in vain do they endeavour to persuade men in private, as well as in their public ministrations: in vain do they confirm every word with the infallible dictates of inspiration: for while men continue destitute of righteousness, "they have eyes, and see not, ears, and hear not, neither do they understand^k." Nothing will effectually shew men their error, till they are "renewed in the spirit of their minds." *Then* they have the film removed from the organs of vision. Then they have a spiritual discernment^l:

^c 2 Cor. iv. 4.^d 1 Chron. xxi. 1—4.^e Isai. v. 20.^f 2 Kings x. 16.^g Luke ix. 53—55.^h Luke xii. 13—15.ⁱ John xvi. 2.^k John viii. 43.^l Eph. i. 17, 18. Col. i. 9. *Συνέσει πνευματικῇ*.

they are no longer deceived by specious appearances; they taste and see the real qualities of things: being "brought out of darkness into marvellous light," they view every thing, in a measure, as God himself views it: and the greater their proficiency is in the divine life, the clearer is their perception of the good or evil that exists^m, not in their actions only, but in their motives and principles of action. And hence it is that the Apostle exhorts us to "be transformed in the renewing of our minds, that we may *prove* (and discern, not by theory only, but by actual experiment) what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of Godⁿ."

Righteousness is further necessary, that we may *repel the assaults* of our enemy.

Sin not only blinds, but debilitates the soul. It is scarcely to be conceived how impotent the natural man is to resist the temptations of Satan. For the most part he makes no resistance at all, but follows the dictates of his imperious master, and yields a willing obedience to his most fatal suggestions. To the ungodly Jews our Lord justly observed, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do^o." Sometimes conscience will make a stand against the wicked one; but it is soon overpowered, and either bribed into consent, or stunned to silence, or forced, in spite of all its efforts, to give way. It may cause one to tremble^p; another to reform in many things^q; another to become almost a Christian^r; another to make a profession of religion, and openly to join himself to the Church of Christ^s: but Satan has nothing to fear from its exertions, unless it stimulate a man to seek a thorough change of heart: he laughs at the fears of Felix, the reformation of Herod, the acknowledgments of Agrippa, and the professions of Simon Magus: he

^m Heb. v. 13, 14.

ⁿ Rom. xii. 2. Εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν refers to the discerning of the qualities of metals by the furnace. See also Phil. i. 9, 10. where the same word is connected with τὰ διαφέροντα, *things that differ*.

^o John viii. 44.

^p Acts xxiv. 25.

^q Mark vi. 20.

^r Acts xxvi. 28.

^s Acts viii. 13.

well knows that, as long as they are unrenewed, they are fast in his chains, and incapable of any effectual exertion: "Ephraim, though armed, and carrying bows, were so enfeebled by sin, that they turned back in the day of battle:" nor could Israel stand before their enemies while an Achan was in their camp^t. So neither can he resist Satan, who yields in any thing to the dominion of sin. If once we "put away a good conscience, we shall speedily make shipwreck of our faith" also^u. But let once the tamest of his vassals feel the influence of divine grace, and instantly he casts off the yoke under which he had groaned, and asserts his liberty. From that moment Satan is constrained to yield to that "stronger power that is come against him^x," and to relinquish the prey which he can no longer retain^y.

The *necessity* of righteousness being thus established, let us proceed to consider,

II. Its *sufficiency*—

The Apostle would not have been so urgent in exhorting us to put on the breast-plate of righteousness, if he had not believed that it would answer all the purposes for which it was designed. That it will protect us, we are well assured: that it will secure to us the victory, there can be no doubt: for it will turn *depravity to sanctity, cowardice to courage, and weakness to strength*.

First, it turns *depravity to sanctity*. It is by our inward corruptions that Satan works. He cannot force us to commit sin: he can only present to us such temptations as are suited to our natural desires; and suggest such considerations to our minds, as are likely to procure our compliance with his will. When he came to assault our Lord, he could not prevail; because "he found nothing in him^z," that in the smallest degree closed with his suggestions. But when he comes to us, he finds in us a predisposition to receive him. If he assault our heart, there are many secret lusts that are ready to betray

^t Ps. lxxviii. 9, 10. Josh. vii. 8, 12, 24, 26. ^u 1 Tim. i. 19.

^x Luke xi. 21, 22.

^y Isai. xlix. 25.

^z John xiv. 30.

us into his hands: he has but to strike a spark, and there is within us combustible matter in abundance, that instantly catches fire, and that, if not extinguished by grace, will burn to the lowest hell. But when the soul is endued with righteousness, its dispositions are altogether changed: "old things are passed away, and all things are become new^a." We say not indeed that there are no remains of corruption in the soul; for the old nature still continues, and counteracts in a measure the operations of the new nature: but if "the flesh lusts against the spirit, the spirit also lusts against the flesh, and gains (not indeed without many conflicts) an ascendant over it^b:" and hence the temptations, which would once have been irresistible, are repelled with indignant firmness; as we see in Joseph, who, when repeatedly solicited to commit adultery, replied with horror, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God^c?"

This then is one way in which righteousness defends the soul: it makes "sin appear exceeding sinful^d;" and holiness to be esteemed as the perfection of bliss^e: and thus, by weakening the force of temptation, it enables us with success to resist the tempter.

In the next place, it turns *cowardice into courage*. Satan gets peculiar advantage over men by means of their carnal fears. In whatever degree men are endued with natural fortitude, their courage fails them when they are called to bear the cross of Christ. When our blessed Lord ministered on earth, Nicodemus, though a ruler and governor, was afraid to come in open day, lest he should be thought to favour his cause^f: nor did "the Pharisees who believed in him, dare to confess him, because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God^g." In instances without number have men who were able to brave death itself on the field of battle,

^a 2 Cor. v. 17.

^b Gal. v. 17.

^c Gen. xxxix. 9.

^d Rom. vii. 13.

^e Ps. cxix. 128.

^f John iii. 1, 2.

^g John xii. 42, 43.

shewn themselves unable to endure the scorn and contempt that universally attach to religious characters: so true is that declaration of Solomon, "The fear of man bringeth a snare^h." But righteousness emboldens the soul; and enables it to meet the hatred and menaces, or (what is still worse) the sneers and ridicule, of an ungodly world with a holy indifference; yea, it causes the soul to rejoice in these things as tokens for goodⁱ, and as testimonies of the Divine favour^k. Behold the astonishing change that was wrought on Peter! When he had inconsiderately laid aside his armour, he was intimidated by the voice of a maid-servant, and induced to deny his Lord with oaths and curses. But when he had put on his breast-plate, he was undismayed in the presence of the whole council of the Jews: he boldly charged upon the rulers that were before him, the guilt of murdering their Messiah: and when they endeavoured to silence him with threats, he undauntedly replied, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard^l." Such was the courage also of the Hebrew Youths, who, unawed by the fiery furnace, and unmoved by the example of a whole nation, disdained to comply with the royal edict; and resolutely exposed themselves to a cruel death, rather than violate the dictates of their conscience^m.

Thus wherever the soul is clad with righteousness, it is emboldened both to do and suffer the will of God: and, consequently, Satan's engine of persecution, whereby he has destroyed myriads, being divested of its power to intimidate the righteous, his dominion over them must for ever cease.

Lastly, righteousness will turn our *weakness to strength*. The powers of man, independent of divine grace, remain the same after conversion as before: of himself he can do nothingⁿ. But that divine

^h Prov. xxix. 25.

ⁱ Luke xxi. 12, 13.

^k Phil. i. 29. and 1 Pet. iv. 14. and Acts v. 41.

^l Acts iv. 18—20.

^m Dan. iii. 18.

ⁿ John xv. 5.

principle which actuates the godly, is mighty in operation: however numerous or powerful their enemies may be, the "grace of Christ is sufficient for them^o;" and the weakest in the universe may say, "Through Christ strengthening me I can do all things^p." Their inherent weakness does not at all militate against this assertion; for, when they are weakest in themselves their strength is at the height: and when they look unto their Lord for help, "he will perfect his strength in their weakness^q." Survey for a moment the Christian's conquests: his lusts are subdued, condemned, crucified^r: the world is overcome, and put under his feet^s: the powers of darkness are put to flight^t: and he is triumphing daily in the God of his salvation^u: so "strengthened is he with might in his inward man^x," and so "mighty are his weapons to destroy the strong holds of sin and Satan, and to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ^y."

What shall we now say *to you who are destitute of this armour*? Shall we congratulate you on your prospects of victory? Shall we even flatter you with hopes of escaping with life? We cannot; we dare not. There is a possibility, that you might vanquish an armed host with a broken pitcher^z; or make the walls of an impregnable fortress to fall with the sound of rams' horns^a: but to succeed without righteousness in your spiritual warfare is impossible: for the truth of God is pledged that you shall perish, if you continue in your unrighteous state^b. "Awake then to righteousness, and sin not^c." Let your earnest prayer ascend up before God, that you may be made new creatures in Christ Jesus^d, and be turned effectually from the power of Satan unto God^e. But do not mistake: do not imagine, that

^o 2 Cor. xii. 9.^p Phil. iv. 13.^q See Heb. v. 13, 14.^r Gal. v. 24.^s 1 John v. 4, 5. Gal. vi. 14.^t Jam. iv. 7.^u 2 Cor. ii. 14.^x Eph. iii. 16. Ps. cxxxviii. 3.^y 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.^z Judg. vii. 19—22. ^a Josh. vi. 4, 5, 20.^b 1 Cor. vi. 9.^c 1 Cor. xv. 34.^d Eph. ii. 10.^e Acts xxvi. 18.

any righteousness which you can attain in your own strength, will thus protect you; or that even that which is wrought in you by the Holy Spirit, has *in itself* such mighty efficacy: that to which such glorious powers are ascribed, is wrought in you by the Spirit of God: and after all, it is not your inherent goodness, but the grace of God, that must preserve you from your enemies. Your inherent righteousness will indeed be made use of by him; but still God must be acknowledged as the only Author of all that is done either in, or by you; and the glory must be given to him alone.

To you who have “the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left”^f, we say, “Stand fast in the Lord^g.” Let nothing prevail upon you to lay aside your breast-plate for one moment: the instant you part with it, you are shorn of your strength, and are become weak as other men^h. “Hold fast then that ye have, that no man take your crownⁱ.” Thus shall your subtle adversary be foiled in all his attacks: he shall never be able to inflict on you any deadly wound. “Then shall you not be ashamed, when you have respect unto all God’s commandments^k.” As “the righteousness of Christ sustained him^l” amidst the fiercest assaults of his enemies, so shall you be preserved whilst fighting under his banners, and following his commands. His express promise to you is, “He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, shall never be moved^m.” And again, “The Lord God is a sun and a shield; he will give grace and glory; and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightlyⁿ.”

^f 2 Cor. vi. 7.

^g Phil. iv. 1.

^h Judg. xvi. 19, 20.

ⁱ Rev. iii. 11.

^k Ps. cxix. 6.

^l Isai. lix. 16.

^m Ps. xv. 2, 5.

ⁿ Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

MMCXXX.

THE CHRISTIAN'S GREAVES.

Eph. vi. 14, 15. *Stand . . . having . . . your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.*

THERE are many things which the art of war has rendered necessary for the success of an army, besides those rude weapons which an untaught savage would employ : and though they may be of inferior and subordinate use, still the want of them may prove as fatal as the want of things that are of primary importance. It would have been to little purpose, in some situations, for soldiers to have their vital parts covered with armour, if they had not also shoes, or greaves, to protect their legs and feet against the sharp stakes, that were fixed in the ground to obstruct their progress. That this was a part of armour in the days of old, the sacred history informs us. Goliath had “greaves of brass upon his legs, as well as a target of brass between his shoulders^a.” And, when the irresistible success of the Chaldeans was foretold, it was particularly said, that “the lachet of their shoes should not be broken^b.” In reference to this part of a soldier's accoutrements, the Apostle exhorts us to have our feet guarded ; and intimates, that as the military shoes gave to him who wore them a readiness to march over any obstacles that might lie in his way, so “the Gospel of peace” gives to the Christian soldier a “preparation,” or readiness, to prosecute his warfare without halting. This it does,

I. As bringing peace into the conscience ; and

II. As producing a peaceful disposition in the soul.

I. The Gospel of peace gives us a readiness to march, *in that it brings peace into the conscience—*

The Gospel is the one source of peace to sinful man. If he obtain peace from any other source, he

^a 1 Sam. xvii. 6.

^b Isai. v. 27.

“heals his wounds slightly, and says, Peace, peace, when there is no peace^c.” It is in the Gospel only that a Saviour is revealed. But there we are informed, that God’s only dear Son became our surety, and our substitute. There we behold our adorable Emmanuel bearing our sins in his own sacred body upon the tree, and effecting by the blood of his cross our reconciliation with God. Through him peace is proclaimed to a guilty world^d: and all who receive into their hearts the record concerning him, have their iniquities blotted out as a morning cloud: their burthens are from that time removed; they have “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness^e.”

Without a measure of this peace, a person finds but little ability to exert himself in his Christian calling. The more difficult duties will be considered as irksome, and impracticable. And this arises from the natural constitution of the human mind: for, what readiness can he have to forego the pleasures of time, who cannot look forward with a comfortable hope to the eternal world? Will not his “hands hang down, his knees be feeble, and his heart be faint?” Yea, will not Satan take advantage of his weak state to make him weary of well-doing; and to “turn him utterly out of the way^f,” and to make him say in despondency, “There is no hope: I have loved idols; and after them will I go^g?” To what a degree the boldest champion may be enervated by apprehensions of God’s displeasure, we may see in the conduct of Joshua. There was but one found in all the thousands of Israel so intrepid as he: yet when he had reason to think that God had withdrawn his favour from him, “he rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark, and put dust upon his head, and said, Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites

^c Jer. vi. 14.^d Acts x. 36.^e Isai. lxi. 3.^f Heb. xii. 12, 13.^g Jer. ii. 25.

to destroy us? Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of Jordan^h. Thus will “our spirit fail,” and our progress be stopped, if “the peace of God keep not our hearts and mindsⁱ.”

But let “the love of God be shed abroad in the heart,” and instantly “the rough places become plain, and the crooked, straight^k.” the “paths of religion become paths of pleasantness and peace.” The most self-denying precepts are not then regarded as “hard sayings^l,” “nor are any of the commandments grievous^m.” And though affliction cannot, in itself, be joyous, yet, as endured for the sake of Christ, it becomes a ground of joy: “having peace with God,” says the Apostle, “we glory in tribulations alsoⁿ.”

Let us look into the Scriptures and see how prompt *for obedience* the saints were made by a sense of God's pardoning love. No sooner had a live coal from off the altar been applied to the lips of the Prophet Isaiah, in token of his acceptance with God, than he was willing, yea desirous, to undertake the most difficult and self-denying services^o. The Thessalonian converts were inferior to none in their attachment to Christ; and, if we inquire what was the source of their distinguished zeal, we shall find that “the Gospel had come to them, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;” and from that moment they became the most eminent followers of Christ, and his Apostle^p. It was no easy service which Mary Magdalen performed in washing the Saviour's feet with her tears; especially in the presence of such a company: yet, “much having been forgiven her, she loved much;” and therefore testified her love in the best manner she was able, notwithstanding she was likely to meet with nothing but derision and contempt from the proud Pharisee, in whose house she was^q. But on this subject we naturally turn our

^h Josh. vii. 6, 7.

ⁱ Isai. lvii. 16.

^k Isai. xl. 4.

^l John vi. 60.

^m 1 John v. 3.

ⁿ Rom. v. 1—3.

^o Isai. vi. 6—8.

^p 1 Thess. i. 5—7.

^q Luke vii. 44—47.

eyes to the Apostle Paul, who “laboured more abundantly than all the Apostles^r.” What the main-spring was of his activity, we are at no loss to determine: it was “the love of Christ that constrained him:” he had been redeemed from death by the death of Christ; and therefore to Christ he consecrated all his time, and all his powers^s.

A readiness *for suffering* also arises from the same source. The “peace” which Moses enjoyed “through believing,” rendered him so superior to all the pleasures of sense, that “he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt; and chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season^t.” St. Paul is yet a more illustrious example, as indeed might well be expected, considering how exceeding abundant had been the mercy shewn towards him^u.” He had already endured far more than any other Apostle for the sake of Christ; yet when the Spirit testified that bonds and afflictions still awaited him where he was going, and the Christians besought him not to proceed on his intended journey to Jerusalem; he replied, “What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am willing not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus^x.” And is it not thus also with ourselves? If our souls be animated with faith and love, we shall “count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations^y;” yea, we shall “rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for the sake of Christ^z,” and the very things which were intended by our enemies for the destruction of the spiritual life, will tend rather to its furtherance and establishment^a.

The same preparation for prosecuting our warfare is imparted to us by the Gospel,

II. *In that it produces a peaceful disposition in the soul—*

^r 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^u 1 Tim. i. 14.

^z Acts v. 41.

^s 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^x Acts xxi. 13.

^a Phil. i. 12.

^t Heb. xi. 24—26.

^y Jam. i. 2.

The soul of man is naturally proud, irritable, vindictive^b. An injurious act, or an insulting word, is sufficient to call forth all our angry passions, and, in many instances, creates within us a resentment, that can be pacified with nothing less than the blood of the delinquent. Behold David, when Nabal refused to administer to his wants ! This one act of churlish ingratitude must be expiated by the life of the offender, and not of the offender only, but of all the males belonging to him ; and David himself goes forth to execute the murderous sentence^c. What an awful picture of human nature does this exhibit ! But the Gospel lays the axe to this “ root of bitterness,” and, by shewing us how much we have been forgiven, inclines us to exercise forgiveness. It teaches us to “ turn the left cheek to him who has smitten us on the right^d :” and “ in no wise to render evil for evil^e.” It enjoins us rather to love our enemies ; and, instead of retaliating their injuries, to relieve their wants^f.

Without this disposition we are but ill prepared to surmount the obstacles which our subtle adversary will place in our way. The scorn and contempt that we shall meet with, will dismay us. Our feelings will be wounded every step we take : and we shall soon be weary of well-doing. In order to judge of the consequences that will ensue, if we be destitute of this part of Christian armour, let us only look at the most eminent saints, when, through haste and inadvertence, they had neglected to fasten on their greaves aright : *Moses*, the meekest of mankind, was inflamed with wrath ; and, by his angry, unadvised words, provoked God to exclude him from the earthly Canaan^g. *Peter*, when he beheld his Lord apprehended in the garden, began to fight after the manner of ungodly men ; and brought on himself that just rebuke ; “ Put up thy sword ; for all who take the sword shall perish with the sword^h.” *St. Paul*

^b Tit. iii. 3. ^c 1 Sam. xxv. 21, 22. ^d Matt. v. 39—41.

^e Rom. xii. 17. ^f Rom. xii. 19, 20. and Matt. v. 44.

^g Numb. xx. 10—12.

^h Matt. xxvi. 51, 52.

himself too, on one occasion, was so irritated with the injustice of his judge, that he brake forth into passionate revilings against his ruler and governor, and was constrained to apologize for his conduct in the presence of his enemiesⁱ. If then these holiest of men were thus sorely wounded through their occasional impatience, what advantage will not Satan gain over those, whose spirit is altogether lofty and unsubdued? Doubtless he will harass them in their march, till they turn back, and recede from the field of battle^k.

But let the Gospel have its due effect; let it render us meek, patient, forbearing, and forgiving; let it transform us into the image of the meek and lowly Jesus, who when he was reviled, reviled not again; and when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to him who judgeth righteously^l; and the stumbling-blocks that offended us before, will appear unworthy of any serious regard. When our enemies persecute us, we shall be ready to weep over them for the evil which they bring upon themselves, rather than be incensed against them for the evil which they do to us^m. We shall use no other weapons against them than “faith and patienceⁿ:” “being defamed, we shall entreat; being persecuted, we shall suffer it^o.” Instead of being “overcome of evil, we shall endeavour to overcome evil with good^p:” and by “letting patience have its perfect work, we shall be perfect and entire, lacking nothing^q.”

It may be objected, perhaps, that, while we conduct ourselves in this way, we shall be trampled under foot of all, and be vanquished by all. But to this we answer, that, though we should be trampled under foot, we should not be vanquished: on the contrary, though “we be killed all the day long, and are as sheep appointed for the slaughter, yet in all these things shall we be more than conquerors^r. We may, like Stephen, be stoned to death: yet, if

ⁱ Acts xxiii. 3—5.

^k Matt. xiii. 21.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

^m Luke xix. 41, 42.

ⁿ Heb. vi. 12.

^o 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.

^p Rom. xii. 21.

^q Jam. i. 4.

^r Rom. viii. 36, 37.

like him, we can pray for our murderers^s, we have the noblest of all victories, *that* of overcoming a vindictive spirit: and, though we fall in the conflict, we maintain the field against all our enemies. Who, do we suppose, was victor, the Jews, who, at Satan's instigation, put our Lord to death; or Jesus, who expired a victim on the cross? We cannot doubt; for we are told in the Scriptures, that, "through death, Jesus overcame death, and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil^t: yes; "on his very cross he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it^u." Nor can *we* more effectually manifest our superiority to all the powers of darkness, than by "resisting unto blood in our strife against sin^x." Were we to become our own avengers, we should "give place to the devil^y;" but by suffering with our Lord, we become partners of his victory^z, and partakers of his glory^a.

What remains now but earnestly to *exhort* you to get "your feet shod with" this blessed Gospel? Consider how many devices Satan has to wound your feet, and to cast you down. We have already noticed persecution, as a very principal engine used by him to obstruct your progress. But there are other means whereby he frequently effects his deadly purpose: many whom he could not stop by persecution, he has turned out of the way by error. Look into the epistles of St. Paul, and see how many he has "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ^b." He has his ministers, as well as Christ; and in outward appearance they are "ministers of righteousness;" nor are they themselves conscious that they are his agents. They propagate what they themselves believe, and oftentimes with a zeal worthy of a better cause. But they themselves are blinded by him; and then are used as his instruments to overthrow the

^s Acts vii. 60.^t Heb. ii. 14.^u Col. ii. 14, 15.^x Heb. xii. 4.^y Eph. iv. 27.^z Rev. xii. 10, 11.^a 2 Tim. ii. 12. and Rom. viii. 17.^b 2 Cor. xi. 3.

faith of others^c. Which of the Churches, planted in the apostolic age, was free from their influence? In which were there not “some who perverted the Gospel of Christ^d,” and some who, by their means, were “turned aside after Satan^e?” At Rome there were those who made it their business to “cause divisions; and by good words and fair speeches to deceive the hearts of the simple^f.” At Corinth, the Church was so distracted by them, that Christian love was almost banished; and nothing but “debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults,” obtained amongst them, insomuch that the Apostle threatened to exert his apostolic authority, and to inflict on them some signal judgments, if they did not reform their conduct before he visited them again^g. As for the Galatian Church, such an ascendancy had the false teachers gained over them, that there was scarcely one who retained his integrity: almost all of them had embraced, what St. Paul calls, “another Gospel;” and, so entirely had they transferred their regards from him to their new teachers, that notwithstanding “they would, not long before, have plucked out their own eyes, and have given them unto him,” they now considered him in no other light than “an enemy^h.” At Ephesus also there were some who, like “children, were tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, while others, by sleight and cunning craftiness, were lying in wait to deceive themⁱ.” At Philippi too, there were “dogs and evil workers, of whom it was needful for them to beware^k.” But time would fail us to enumerate the heresies that were propagated, and the apostasies that were occasioned by them, even in the purest ages of the Church. The epistles to Timothy and Titus

^c 2 Cor. xi. 13—15. with Rev. iii. 9. Such ministers with their hearers are “*the synagogue of Satan*,” who is their teacher, their instigator, and their god.

^d Gal. i. 7.

^e 1 Tim. v. 15.

^f Rom. xvi. 17, 18.

^g 1 Cor. i. 10, 11. and iii. 3, 4. and 2 Cor. xii. 20, 21. and xiii. 2, 10.

^h Gal. i. 6. and iv. 9—11, 15—17. and v. 7, 8.

ⁱ Eph. iv. 14.

^k Phil. iii. 2.

are full of complaints respecting these deceivers, and of *cautions to avoid all intercourse, either with them, or with their followers*¹.

Now let any one say, whether, after so many sad examples, he himself needs not to be well established in the true Gospel, lest he be “led aside by the error of the wicked, and fall from his own steadfastness^m?”

But it will be asked, How shall I know the true Gospel from those counterfeits which are proposed for my acceptance? To this we answer, The true Gospel is a “Gospel of peace.” It is a Gospel which sets forth Jesus as our hope, “our *peace*,” and our allⁿ. It is a Gospel which leads us to “shew all meekness^o,” and, “as much as lieth in us, to live peaceably with all men^p.” Particularly also will it prompt us to seek the welfare of the Church, and to “follow the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another^q.” Whoever therefore would turn us from Christ as the foundation of our hope; or would “cause divisions and offences in the Church,” in order to “scatter the flock of Christ, and to draw them” from their proper fold^r; we have reason to think him no other than a “wolf in sheep’s clothing^s,” a minister of Satan in the garb of a “minister of righteousness:” and we should beware, lest, by listening to such an one, our “unstable souls be beguiled^t,” and we “fall so as never to be renewed unto repentance^u.” We must not only take heed *how* we hear, but *what* we hear^x: for if “whole houses

¹ 1 Tim. i. 3, 4, 6, 7, 19, 20. and iv. 1, 6. and v. 12, 15. and vi. 3—5, (“*from such withdraw thyself*,”) 20, 21. and 2 Tim. i. 13—15. and ii. 16—18, 23. and iii. 5, (“*from such turn away*,”) 6—9, 13. and iv. 3, 4, 14, 15. Tit. i. 9—11, 13, 14. and iii. 9—11. See also Rom. xvi. 17, 18. before cited, “*avoid them*,” and 2 Pet. ii. 1, 2. and 1 John ii. 19. and iv. 1. and 2 John, ver. 7, 10, 11. “*receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed*,” &c. and 3 John, ver. 10. and Jude, ver. 4. and Rev. ii. 14, 15, 20, 24.

^m Heb. xiii. 9. 2 Pet. iii. 17.

ⁿ 1 Tim. i. 1. Eph. ii. 14—17. Col. iii. 11.

^o Tit. iii. 2.

^p Rom. xii. 18.

^q Rom. xiv. 19.

^r Acts xx. 29, 30.

^s Matt. vii. 15.

^t 2 Pet. ii. 14.

^u Heb. vi. 6.

^x Luke viii. 18. with Mark iv. 24.

were subverted^y” in the days of the Apostles, and “all the Christians in Asia were turned away from” the ministry of St. Paul^z, there is no minister whom we may not be induced to forsake, nor is there any one so established in the truth but he has need to pray that he may be kept from error.

Surely we need no stronger arguments to enforce the exhortation of the text. Let us get the knowledge of the Gospel : let us receive it, not as a theory merely, but as a practical and living principle, that shall influence our hearts and lives. And when we have received it, let us be tenacious of it ; let us “hold fast the form of sound doctrine that we have received^a.” Let us make use of it to keep us firm in the midst of difficulties, and steadfast in the midst of errors. Let us “be ever on our guard, lest any root of bitterness springing up, trouble us, and thereby many be defiled^b.” Finally, let us “stand fast in the Lord^c :” so we shall, like our Lord himself, “endure the cross, and despise the shame, and sit down as victors on the right hand of the throne of God^d.”

^y Tit. i. 11.

^b Heb. xii. 15.

^z 2 Tim. i. 15.

^c Phil. iv. 1.

^a 2 Tim. i. 13.

^d Heb. xii. 2.

MMCXXXI.

THE CHRISTIAN'S SHIELD.

Eph. vi. 16. *Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*

NOTWITHSTANDING the armour of the ancients was generally so constructed, that it could repel any weapon that might come against it, the warrior did not conceive himself to be completely armed without a shield. In reference to the Christian soldier, this observation may be applied with still greater propriety ; because, however excellent the different pieces of his armour may be, not one of them will suffice for his protection, unless it be itself also

covered with the shield of faith. As "without faith it is impossible to please God," so without faith it is impossible to withstand Satan. That powerful adversary will soon pierce through our "truth" and "righteousness," if they be exposed to his assault without any additional defence. On this account the Apostle directs, that "above all," and in addition to all, we should "take the shield of faith."

In illustrating this divine injunction we propose to shew,

I. The office of faith in the Christian's armour—

II. Its transcendent excellence—

I. The office of faith in the Christian's armour—

The particular use of a shield is to ward off a blow from any part of the body that may be menaced; and for that end it is to be applied in every direction, as occasion may require.

Now Satan strikes sometimes at one part, and sometimes at another, according as the different parts may seem most open to his attack. And the temptations with which he makes his assault, are as "fiery darts," which fly with incredible velocity, and are calculated to inflame the soul with their deadly poison.

The office of faith, and its power to repel these darts, will distinctly appear, while we shew how it enables the Christian to foil Satan in all his attempts to wound either his *head*, or *heart*.

Satan has many fierce and fiery temptations, whereby he endeavours to wound the *head*. There is not any thing so horrid or blasphemous, which he will not suggest to the mind. Even *atheism* itself is not so shocking, but he is capable of impressing the idea of it upon the soul, and of leading men to an adoption of it in practice, at least, if not also in theory and judgment^a. From the apparent inequality that there is in the dispensations of Providence, Satan

^a Ps. xiv. 1.

raises a doubt whether there be a God ; or, at least, whether he interfere at all in the concerns of men^b, or will judge the world in righteousness at the last day^c. He will take occasion also from the difficulties that there are in Scripture to draw men to *infidelity*. “ How can that be the word of God which is so full of contradictions ? And who can know with any certainty what it declares to us, when those who profess to believe it, are of such opposite sentiments ? ” By such temptations as these he assaults chiefly the avowed enemies of God. But there are other temptations whereby he labours (and with too much success) to turn from the faith those who confess the divine authority of the Scriptures. He will draw them into *errors* of various kinds, and thus undermine the principles which he could not destroy by open assault. Time would not suffice to point out the innumerable errors to which he has given birth, and by which he has destroyed the souls of men : but there is one way in which almost all of them have been produced and propagated : *he induces men to take some one truth of Scripture, and to magnify its importance beyond all due bounds, and to exalt it, not only above all other truths, but to the utter exclusion of them* ; and thus he founds error upon truth, and the most “ damnable heresies ” upon the sacred records. Mark the different heresies, and examine them by this test ; and the truth of the observation will immediately appear. Because our blessed Saviour was a man, and both lived and died as an example to his followers, therefore the *Socinians* affirm that he was *only* a man, and that he died *only* as an example ; and thus they set aside both his divinity and atonement. Because the Spirit of God is represented as dwelling in believers, therefore the *Mystics* reduce all religion to a vain conceit about the light within them ; from a regard to which, they overlook the work of Christ for them, yea, and supersede the plainest institutions of religion, and, in a very great degree, the Scriptures themselves. In the same

^b Ps. lxxiii. 12, 13.^c Zeph. i. 12.

manner the *Antinomian* advocate for faith excludes good works from his system; whilst the *Moralist*, from an ignorant zeal for good works, discards all concern about the faith of Christ. The rigid *Predestinarian* asserts the sovereignty of God to the subversion of man's freedom and responsibility; while *the contender for the freedom and sufficiency of man's will*, obliterates the decrees of heaven, and denies his dependence on God.

To enter more minutely into these various heresies would lead us too far from our subject. The point to be illustrated is, How does faith enable us to avoid them? But previous to this inquiry, it will be proper to shew briefly, that these errors do indeed proceed from Satan as their author; and that they are not unfitly compared to fiery darts.

Nothing can be plainer in the Scriptures than that Satan is the great author of error, not only because he is "the father of lies^d," and "the deceiver of the world^e," but because the propagators of error are expressly called his children^f, and his ministers^g; and they who have embraced error, are said to have been "tempted of the tempter^h," and to have "turned aside after Satanⁱ," and to be "of the synagogue of Satan^k."

This point will receive additional confirmation, by observing with what propriety his temptations are compared to "fiery darts;" for how suddenly do they strike the mind! how deeply also do they penetrate! and with what venom do they inflame the soul! Truly "they set on fire the whole course of nature; and themselves are set on fire of hell^l." St. Paul speaks of those who are turned from the truth as being "bewitched^m:" and indeed, when we see what infatuation seizes them, how their understandings are blinded, their judgments warped, their conscience perverted, and how they are carried away by their own pride and self-sufficiency, without ever

^d John viii. 44.

^e 2 Cor. xi. 15.

^k Rev. iii. 9.

^g Rev. xii. 9.

^h 1 Thess. iii. 5.

^l Jam. iii. 6.

^f Acts xiii. 10.

ⁱ 1 Tim. v. 15.

^m Gal. iii. 1.

considering what spirit they are of, or conceiving it possible that they should be misled; we cannot but confess that they are the unhappy victims of satanic agency.

Now we come to the point proposed, to consider how faith repels these fiery darts.

Faith, provided it be a true and living faith, receives the word of God simply on the authority of him that revealed itⁿ. It staggers not at any difficulties either in the dispensations of his providence, or the declarations of his grace. Conscious of man's inability to comprehend even the most common matters in their full extent, the believer submits his reason to God, and receives without gainsaying whatsoever divine wisdom has revealed^o. Now the interference of God in the government of the world, even in the falling of a sparrow^p, or of the hairs of our head^q, is most clearly asserted in the inspired volume; and, on that account, no occurrence whatever is suffered to weaken the conviction, that all things are under his immediate and entire controul^r. Nor do the difficulties that are in Scripture at all lessen its authority in the believer's eyes: whatever he cannot account for as arising from the circumstances under which the Scriptures have been handed down to us, he puts to the score of his own ignorance, and contentedly says, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter^s." And, as to all the heresies that have been broached in the Christian Church, he has one way of repelling all: he "compares spiritual things with spiritual^t;" not hastily rejecting any plain declaration of God, because he cannot discern its harmony and agreement with some other declaration: he rather looks to God for the teachings of his Spirit; and keeps his mind ready to embrace whatever may tend to his own humiliation, or to the glory of God. If it be thought that still he will be as open to receive error as truth, we answer, that God has promised to "guide him into all

ⁿ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

^o Jam. i. 21.

^p Matt. x. 29.

^q Matt. x. 30.

^r Isai. xlv. 7.

^s John xiii. 7.

^t 1 Cor. ii. 13.

truth^u;" and that every believer has within himself the witness of all the fundamental doctrines of our religion^x; so that, "though he be a mere fool" in all other matters, "he shall surely be kept from error" in the concerns of his soul^v.

We must next call your attention to the temptations wherewith Satan assaults the *heart*. Under this term we include both the will and the affections; the former of which he endeavours to weaken by terrors, while he corrupts the latter by the allurements of sense.

As soon as that wicked fiend beholds any turning unto God, he will suggest to their minds the comforts they must sacrifice, the reproaches they must incur, the losses they must sustain, and the insuperable difficulties they must encounter; that so he may shake their resolution, and divert them from their purpose. It was thus that he prevented the entrance of the Israelites into Canaan^z. It was thus also that he succeeded in damping the ardour of that wealthy youth, who, from love to his great possessions, relinquished all hope of an interest in Christ^a. And in the same manner does he prevail with thousands of the present day, who would gladly participate his blessings, if they could retain together with them their carnal attachments^b.

If he cannot succeed by these means, he will represent their case as hopeless; and dissuade them from prosecuting their course by the consideration, that their efforts will be in vain^c.

To others he will propose the pleasures of sense. He will set before them, as he did before our Lord^d, the glory of the world; he will draw their attention to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life^e." He will represent these things in the most fascinating view; well knowing, that if he can but induce them to love either the pleasures, or the

^u John xvi. 13.

^y Isai. xxxv. 8. with Ps. xxv. 9.

^a Matt. xix. 21, 22.

^c Jer. xviii. 12. ^d Matt. iv. 8, 9.

^x 1 John v. 10.

^z Numb. xiv. 1—4.

^b Matt. viii. 19—22.

^e 1 John ii. 15, 16.

riches, or the honours of the world, he has accomplished his purpose, and effectually alienated their hearts from God^f.

Now these also are as “fiery darts,” which, if they once enter into the soul, will burn up all the good that is within it, and destroy it utterly.

But faith is as useful to protect the heart, as to defend the head. As it obviates every difficulty that may perplex the understanding, so it wards off every thing that may intimidate or defile the soul.

To the temptations that assault the will, faith opposes *the importance* of eternal things: ‘Be it so; I must endure much if I will adhere to my purpose of serving God: but what shall I have to endure if I do *not* serve him? It is not a matter of mere choice, but of absolute necessity; for “what shall it profit me if I gain the whole world, and lose my own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul^g?” Let me not then hear of difficulties; for if Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace were before me, it were better to suffer martyrdom at once with the Hebrew Youths, than to renounce my allegiance to God^h. With respect to the hopelessness of my case, nothing but destruction can result from despair: for “to whom can I go, if not to Him who has the words of eternal lifeⁱ?” God helping me therefore I will go forward; and if I perish, I will perish^k at the foot of my Redeemer’s cross, crying for mercy as the chief of sinners.’

Then to the temptations that assault the affections, faith opposes *the excellency* of eternal things: ‘True; I might enjoy the pleasures of sin; but would they equal the pleasure of serving God, and especially those “pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore?” Are not “the unsearchable riches of Christ,” together with “the honour that cometh of God,” sufficient to counterbalance any riches or honours that I may forego for Christ’s

^f Matt. vi. 24. with Jam. iv. 4.

^g Matt. xvi. 26.

^h Dan. iii. 18.

ⁱ John vi. 68.

^k Alluding to Esth. iv. 16. and to 2 Kings vii. 4.

sake? Avaunt, Satan, for what thou offerest me is poor, transient, delusive: whereas the blessedness of the saints, both in this world and the next, is substantial, exquisite, everlasting.' Thus it was that Moses argued, when he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season:" and the principle that dictated the argument, was "faith¹." This was his "shield;" and the same will enable us also to repel the darts of Satan, however fiercely they be hurled, and however formidably they may come against us.

Having thus illustrated the office of faith, we proceed to point out,

II. Its transcendent excellence—

Somewhat of this has already appeared: but the high encomium which the Apostle bestows on this piece of armour in particular above all others, manifestly demands a more distinct consideration.

We may observe then in commendation of faith, considered as the Christian's shield, that its *use is universal*; its *application is easy*; its *success is sure*.

First, *its use is universal*—

All the other parts of armour have their distinct province, to which they are confined. "Truth" and "righteousness" defend *the heart*; but they are of no use at all to protect *the head*. But faith is universally applicable to every species of temptation. Faith discerns *the truth* of the Gospel, and thereby is fitted to preserve *the head from error*: it discerns also *the importance and excellence* of the Gospel, and is therefore proper to preserve *the heart from sin*. It is no less useful to *the feet*; for we "stand by faith^m," and "walk by faithⁿ." Every step we take is safest under the guidance of faith, because it both affords us the best light, and enables us to walk without stumbling even in the dark^o.

¹ Heb. xi. 24—26.

^m 2 Cor. i. 24.

ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 7.

^o Isai. l. 10. Mic. vii. 8.

Let this consideration then operate on all, and stir us all up to seek faith. Let us not hastily conclude that we possess this principle; for “all men have not faith^p.” “Faith is the gift of God^q.” nor can we have it, unless it have been given us from above. O that all would seek it at the hands of a reconciled God! Beloved brethren, be not satisfied with “the girdle of sincerity,” or “the breast-plate of righteousness,” or “the greaves of Gospel peace:” they are all good and useful in their place; but it is faith, that gives even to them their chief strength; and it is faith, by which alone you can ever be victorious. Does the world tempt you? “this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith^r.” Does corruption harass you? you must “purify your heart by faith^s.” Do your graces languish? It is faith alone that will set them to work in a way of love^t. And lastly, does the devil as a roaring lion threaten to devour you? It is by being steadfast in the faith that you must resist and vanquish him^u. Think then of the use and efficacy of faith; and pray to our adorable Saviour in the words of his Apostles, “Lord increase our faith^x.”

In the next place we observe, that *its application is easy*—

A shield is easily transferred from one position to another as occasion may require: and faith also quickly moves to the protection of any part that is attacked. We do not say, that it is an easy thing to *produce* faith; for it requires no less power than that which was exerted in raising Christ from the dead, to create faith in the heart^y. But when a person has faith, then, we say, it is easy for him to apply it for his defence. Suppose that our head were attacked with subtle heresies, and we had nothing but reason to counteract the temptation; how weak, how tardy, how uncertain would be its operation! The greater part of mankind would not

^p 2 Thess. iii. 2.

^q Phil. i. 29.

^r 1 John v. 4.

^s Acts xv. 9.

^t Gal. v. 6.

^u 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.

^x Luke xvii. 5.

^y Eph. i. 19, 20.

have either time or ability to follow Satan in all his arguments; nor would those of the strongest intellect ever arrive at certainty; they could rise no higher than opinion at the last; while those of inferior talents would be lost in endless perplexity. Suppose again that our heart were attacked with some fiery lust, and we had no better defence than that which reason could afford; would passion listen to the voice of reason? As well might we attempt to extinguish flames that were consuming our house, by a slight sprinkling of water with the hand, as to stop the course of our passions by the efforts of unassisted reason. But in either of these cases, one single word from Scripture will suffice. How was it that our great Captain repelled the fiery darts that were cast at him? "It is written;" "It is written;" "It is written^z." Thus he fought; and his vanquished enemy fled from before him. Thus also must we fight; and by opposing to our enemy this shield, the weakest and most ignorant is as sure of victory, as the strongest and most intelligent. In some respects the poor and ignorant have an advantage over the rich and learned; because they exercise faith, for the most part, in a more simple manner; whereas the others are ever trusting, more or less, to their own reason: and it is expressly with a view to confound the pride of reason, that God has given this superiority to the poor, and "chosen them, in preference to others, to be rich in faith^a."

Let this then operate as a further inducement with us to seek faith, since none of us can get the victory without it^b; and by it the very weakest on earth shall be able to remove mountains^c.

Lastly, we may affirm, that *its success is sure*—

But for their faith, the most eminent of God's saints would have been destroyed. "I had fainted," says David, "if I had not believed^d:" and Peter would have been driven away as the chaff, if our Lord had

^z Luke iv. 4, 8, 10.

^a Jam. ii. 5.

^b Isai. vii. 9.

^c Matt. xvii. 20.

^d Ps. xxvii. 13.

not secured his faith from failing^e. On the other hand, we have a host of saints upon record, who, “through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens: women received their dead to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. *These all obtained a good report THROUGH FAITH^f.*” Further, if we search the annals of the world, we shall not find one single instance wherein believers were ultimately vanquished. On many occasions they have been wounded, and sorely too: even the father of the faithful himself was not so expert in the use of his shield as to ward off every blow^g: but believers are secured from any fatal stroke. Our Lord himself has pledged his word that they shall never perish^h; that, if they fall, they shall be raised up again to renew the contestⁱ; and, that “Satan shall finally be bruised under their feet^k.”

Remarkable in this view are the expressions of the text. The idea of “*quenching*” the fiery darts of the wicked one, may perhaps refer to the custom of making shields sometimes of raw hides, that, in case a poisoned arrow should perforate them, the wound, which on account of the poison must otherwise have been fatal, might be healed. But perhaps the true meaning may be, that by faith we shall as completely defeat the malignant efforts of Satan, as by the extinguishing of fire we shall be delivered from its

^e Luke xxii. 32.

^f Heb. xi. 33—39.

^g Gen. xii. 12, 13. and xx. 2.

^h John v. 24. and x. 28.

ⁱ Ps. xxxvii. 24. and cxlv. 14.

^k Rom. xvi. 20.

fury. Nor is this true of *some* temptations only; it extends to "*all*" without exception. Nor can it be said of some believers only, who are of the highest class; for all who are armed with the shield of faith, whether they be old or young, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, "*shall be able*" perfectly, and for ever, to subdue their adversary.

To all then we say, "Have faith in God^l:" if "ye have believed in the Father, believe also in Christ^m." "Believe in the Lord, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosperⁿ."

^l Mark xi. 22.

^m John xiv. 1.

ⁿ 2 Chron. xx. 20.

MMCXXXII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S HELMET.

Eph. vi. 17. *And take the helmet of salvation.*

THE generality of mankind have very inadequate ideas of the Christian warfare. They know but little of the enemies with whom we have to contend, or of the imminent danger to which we are exposed through their continual assaults. But, as some conception might be formed of the power of an enemy, by viewing the extensive preparations that were made to oppose him, so may we learn to estimate the difficulties of the spiritual warfare, by surveying the various parts of armour which God has prepared for our defence. We have already noticed the girdle and breast-plate, for the body; the greaves, for the legs and feet; the shield, for the head, in common with the rest of the body: but yet the head is not sufficiently protected; it must have a piece of armour more appropriate; a piece suited to its necessities, and fitted for its use. In the account given us of Goliath, we read that "he had *a helmet* of brass upon his head^a:" and such a piece of armour is provided for us also; we are required to "take the helmet of salvation."

^a 1 Sam. xvii. 5.

In opening this subject we shall shew,

I. What we are to understand by “salvation”—

II. Its use and importance in the Christian warfare—

I. What are we to understand by the term “salvation?”

It is evident that the expression is elliptical; nor should we know how, with any certainty, to complete the sense, if the Apostle himself had not supplied the defect in a parallel passage: but all doubt is removed by that exhortation in his Epistle to the Thessalonians^b, “Let us who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and *for an helmet, the hope of salvation.*” From hence we see that HOPE is the Christian’s helmet. Yet, because there are various kinds of hope, and only *one* that will afford the Christian any effectual protection, we must enter more particularly into the subject, and distinguish the scriptural hope from every other that may be mistaken for it.

In the first place then, true hope has *salvation for its object*. This is very strongly marked in different parts of Scripture: for we are said to be “saved by hope^c,” and salvation itself is sometimes called hope; they who look for salvation, are said to be “looking for that blessed *hope^d*,” at other times, hope is called salvation: we are exhorted in the text to take the helmet of *salvation*. There are many, whose hopes have respect indeed to eternal life; but they are unmindful of their lost estate; they are regardless of that way of deliverance, which God has provided for them through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus; they expect heaven, because they have done nothing to forfeit it: if they have sinned, they have not sinned in such a degree as to deserve the wrath of God; they have committed only common and venial faults; they have, moreover, done many things to counterbalance their evil deeds; and therefore they hope for heaven as the award of

^b 1 Thess. v. 8.

^c Rom. viii. 24.

^d Tit. ii. 13.

justice, rather than as a gift of *unbounded mercy*. This, for distinction sake, we may call a *self-righteous* hope: whereas the hope of every true Christian is founded altogether on the merits of Christ, and has respect to salvation, as purchased for us by *his* obedience unto death.

Further, true hope has *God for its author*. There is scarcely a person to be found in the world, who, if the question were put to him, Do you hope to go to heaven if you die in your present state? would not answer in the affirmative. If we should proceed to inquire, Whence got you that hope? they would tell us, that they had always had it. But this is a *presumptuous* hope, the offspring of ignorance and conceit. Widely different from this is the Christian's hope. He has trembled for his state: he has seen his guilt and danger: he has "fled for refuge to the hope set before him." God has revealed to him the riches of his grace; and has shewn him that "where sin hath abounded, grace shall much more abound." The Holy Spirit has "taken of the things of Christ, and shewn them unto him:" yea, he has convinced him, that "the blood of Jesus Christ is able to cleanse him from all sin;" and that "all who believe in Christ, are justified from all things." In this way God has inspired him with hope, that, notwithstanding all his past iniquities, he shall obtain salvation: and though there may be a considerable difference as to the degree of fear or terror that may precede this hope, yet this is the way in which it is invariably wrought in the soul. Hence it is said, that "God begets us unto a lively hope^e;" and "gives us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace^f;" and that "he fills us with joy and peace in believing, that we may *abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost*^g."

Once more; true hope has *holiness for its inseparable companion*. Whatever may be imagined to the contrary, there is no salvation to those who live

^e 1 Pet. i. 3.

^f 2 Thess. ii. 16.

^g Rom. xv. 13.

in sin. Christ came to “save us *from* our sins,” but not *in* them. We are expressly told that “the grace of God which bringeth salvation, teaches us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ^h.” There is a kind of hope that will consist with the indulgence of secret lust, and with a total want of holy dispositions: but that is “the hope of the hypocrite which perisheth, and shall be swept away with the besom of destructionⁱ. But the hope of the upright is far different from this: it will admit of no allowed sin, whether of omission or of commission: on the contrary, we are told, that “he who hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as God is pure^k:” he will retain no bosom lusts; he will not so much as wish for any exceptions and reserves in his obedience to God: he will desire, and endeavour, to be “holy as God is holy, and perfect even as his Father that is in heaven is perfect.”

This then may serve to distinguish the Christian’s hope from that which is *self-righteous, presumptuous, or hypocritical*; and consequently to determine with considerable accuracy, what that hope is, that is connected with salvation. And though the text itself does not so much as mention hope, and much less discriminate between its different kinds, yet the very omission of these things points out the evident propriety of marking clearly what the import of salvation is, and what that is which alone deserves the name.

We may now, with much greater advantage, proceed to shew,

II. The use and importance of salvation in the Christian warfare—

The importance of this helmet is not obscurely intimated in that prophecy respecting Christ, wherein

^h Tit. ii. 11—13.

ⁱ Job viii. 13, 14.

^k 1 John iii. 3.

it is said “He put on righteousness as a breast-plate, and a *helmet of salvation* upon his head¹.”

But, to mark it more distinctly, we may observe, that it *prepares us for conflicts, sustains us in them, and brings us victorious through them.*

Hope *prepares us for conflicts.* A man armed with a helmet, feels himself ready to battle: he fears not to meet his adversary, because he has a defence, which, he trusts, will prove sufficient for his preservation. Thus a man that has a hope of salvation, enters into the combat with holy confidence. He is not intimidated by the frowns of an ungodly world, because he “knows in whom he has believed, and that God is able to keep that which he has committed to him^m.” He says with David, “Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in him will I be confidentⁿ.” This subject cannot be more strongly illustrated than in Caleb and the whole nation of the Israelites. The nation were terrified at the report of the spies, and, instead of proceeding to fight against the Canaanites, proposed to appoint a captain, and go back again into Egypt: but Caleb, whose hope was lively, stood unmoved, and strove to animate his countrymen with an assurance of easy victory^o. And thus, while the hearts of others are failing them for fear, and they “turn back unto perdition,” rather than contend with their adversaries, the true Christian, “encourages himself in his God^p,” and makes up his mind to die or conquer.

Further, a true hope will *sustain us in conflicts.* Many who have shewn intrepidity at first, have yet fainted when their trials were severe and of long continuance. But he who has a hope full of immortality, will never yield, however painful the conflict may be, and however heavy the pressure. “The patriarchs continued to sojourn in the land of promise as mere pilgrims, notwithstanding they had frequent

¹ Isai. lix. 17.

^m 2 Tim. i. 12.

ⁿ Ps. xxvii. 3.

^o Numb. xiii. 30, 31. and xiv. 1—4.

^p 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

opportunity to return" to their own country and kindred: but they accounted the trial as nothing, because "they looked for a better country, that is, an heavenly;" and expected in due time to arrive at "a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God^q." Many women also who were tortured by the most ingenious cruelty even unto death, yet declined accepting deliverance upon dishonourable terms, that they might be accounted worthy to obtain a better resurrection^r. St. Paul too, that bright pattern of all virtues, assigns this as the reason why he did not faint under his unparalleled afflictions: "his outward man decayed; but his inward man was renewed day by day:" and his afflictions appeared to him light and momentary, because he looked from the vanities of time and sense to the invisible realities of eternity^s.

Thus shall *our* trials rather confirm, than weaken, our hope, provided it be scriptural and genuine: "our tribulation shall work patience; our patience, experience; and our experience, hope^t."

Once more: true faith will *bring us victorious through* our conflicts. The Lord Jesus Christ himself in this respect fully verified the prophecies respecting him; and set us an example, which it is our privilege to follow. The Prophet Isaiah represents Jesus as speaking in these triumphant strains: "The Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint; and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who shall contend with me? let us stand together; who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up^u." Thus will hope enable *us* also to anticipate the victory, while yet we are fighting on the field of battle: through it, we may defy all

^q Heb. xi. 8—10, 13—16.

^s 2 Cor. iv. 16—18.

^u Isai. l. 7—9.

^r Heb. xi. 35.

^t Rom. v. 3, 4.

the powers of earth or hell ever to “separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus^x.” Yea, such “an anchor shall it be to our souls,” that we shall be steadfast^y in the midst of this tempestuous world, and be enabled to outride the storm, which causes many to “make shipwreck of their faith^z,” and ultimately sinks them to everlasting perdition^a.

Let me then entreat you, first, to *get this helmet*. Be not satisfied with a delusive hope that will fail you in the day of necessity; but bring it to the trial: see whether it be able to endure the assaults of your adversary: compare it with the description which God himself gives of that which is true and saving. Look well to it that it be not self-righteous, presumptuous, or hypocritical. Be well assured that it is of heavenly temper: and let daily experience shew, that it enables you to “lift up your head above all your enemies,” whether outward or inward, terrestrial or infernal. Think with yourselves, how awful it would be to find, either in the hour of death or in the day of judgment, that you had deceived yourselves with some phantom of your own imagination, and formed expectations of happiness that cannot be realized. O do not expose yourselves to such a dreadful disappointment. Remember the fate of the foolish virgins: they hoped that their lamp of profession would suffice, though they were destitute of the oil whereby alone they could make their light to shine. Through this they perished^b, as thousands of others have done, by resting in their religious privileges, or their outward conformity to the Divine will, when they had not the inward principle of renewing, sanctifying grace^c. But let it not be so with you. “Judge yourselves, that you may not be judged of the Lord^d.” And beg of God to give you that “hope that shall never make you ashamed^e.”

Next, we would urge you to *keep on this helmet* in all your conflicts. Constant will be Satan's endeavours

^x Rom. viii. 31—39.

^y Heb. vi. 19.

^z 1 Tim. i. 19.

^a Heb. x. 39.

^b Matt. xxv. 4, 8—11.

^c Matt. vii. 21—23.

^d 1 Cor. xi. 31.

^e Rom. v. 5.

to deprive you of it; and great his triumph if he succeed. Above all things, be careful that you “cast not away your confidence, but hold fast the rejoicing of your hope firm unto the end^f.” If at any time you begin to be distracted with doubts and fears, instantly check yourselves as David did; “Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? *hope* thou in God^g.”

Though you are to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling^h,” you must “not run as uncertainly, or fight as one that beateth the airⁱ :” you must remember who is engaged for your support; and that “he is faithful who hath promised^k.” It is true, “you have need of patience, that after you have done the will of God you may receive the promise^l :” but “if you hope for that you see not, such a hope implies, that you will with patience wait for it^m.” St. James proposes to you the examples of the husbandman: “Behold,” says he, “the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient: stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nighⁿ ;” and then shall your confidence be richly rewarded^o. “Gird up then the loins of your mind; be sober, and *hope to the end* for the grace that shall be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ^p.” This is the way, the sure way, to conquer. “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; knowing assuredly, that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord^q.”

Lastly, *let that which is your defence, be also your ornament*. There is not a more ornamental part of the soldier’s armour, than the helmet. Nor is there any thing that more adorns the Christian, than a lively, steadfast, and consistent hope. In the exercise of hope, he stands, as it were, on the top of Pisgah,

^f Heb. iii. 6, 14.

ⁱ 1 Cor. ix. 26.

^m Rom. viii. 25.

^p 1 Pet. i. 13.

^g Ps. xlii. 11.

^k Heb. x. 23.

ⁿ Jam. v. 7, 8.

^q 1 Cor. xv. 58.

^h Phil. ii. 13.

^l Heb. x. 36.

^o Heb. x. 35.

and surveys the land of promise, the land that floweth with milk and honey^r. He longs to leave this dreary wilderness, and to “enter into the joy of his Lord.” Knowing that “when his earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved, he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, he groans, earnestly desiring that mortality may be swallowed up of life^s.” If he had crowns and kingdoms in his possession, still he would account it “far better to depart and to be with Christ^t.” He is “looking for, and hasting to, the coming of the day of Christ^u,” and thus has “his conversation in heaven,” while yet he remains a sojourner upon earth^x. View the Christian in this frame, and confess, that the sun shining in his meridian strength, glorious as it is, “has no glory, by reason of the Christian’s glory that excelleth.” This, this, Christians, is the state in which you ought to live. Were you more habitually in this frame, your years of warfare would seem as nothing, for the greatness of the prize for which you contend^y. You can scarcely conceive what an energy such a frame would give to your souls. You would soon come to Jesus with joy and wonder, like his Disciples of old, saying, “Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name:” and he in return would increase your confidence by saying, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and *nothing shall by any means hurt you*^z.” Do but consider, how weak will Satan’s temptations be, when you thus abound in hope! how little will any thing be able to move you, when you are thus, by joyful anticipation, “sitting already with Christ in heavenly places^a!” Beloved brethren, this is your perfection: “you will come behind in no gift, when you are thus waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus^b.”

^r Deut. xxxiv. 1.^s 2 Cor. v. 1—4.^t Phil. i. 23.^u 2 Pet. iii. 12.^x Phil. iii. 20.^y Alluding to Gen. xxix. 20.^z Luke x. 17—19.^a Eph. ii. 16.^b Compare 2 Cor. xiii. 9. with 1 Cor. i. 7.

Whatever you have to do, you will do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance^c." May God enable you thus to live, till faith shall be lost in sight, and hope be consummated in enjoyment !

^c Col. iii. 22.

MMCXXXIII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S SWORD.

Eph. vi. 17. *Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

THE Christian's warfare is principally of the defensive kind ; yet not so entirely, but that he must follow up the advantages which he has at any time gained, and seek the utter destruction of those enemies which infest his soul : after sustaining their assaults, he must himself become the assailant ; having resisted the world and sin, he must proceed to overcome^a, condemn^b, and crucify^c them ; and having withstood Satan, he must go on to "bruise him under his feet^d." That he may be enabled to carry this into effect, God has provided for him an offensive weapon, which, if skilfully used, shall accomplish the ruin of all his enemies. To the consideration of this we are led by the text ; in elucidating which we shall notice,

I. The description given of the Christian's sword—

II. Its usefulness to him in all his combats—

I. Let us notice the description given of the Christian's sword—

What the sword is to a warrior, that the Scriptures are to a child of God ; they enable him to inflict a deadly wound on his adversaries, and to subdue them before him.

^a 1 John v. 4.

^b Heb. xi. 7.

^c Gal. v. 24. and vi. 14.

^d Rom. xvi. 20.

Now the appellation here given to the Scriptures is deserving of particular attention. They are called, "the word of God," and "the sword of the Spirit."

They are called with great propriety, "the word of God;" first, *because they were inspired by him*. They were indeed written by men; but men were only the agents and instruments that God made use of: they wrote only what God by his Spirit dictated to them: so that, in reality, the whole Scripture was as much written by the finger of God, as the laws were, which he inscribed on two tables of stone, and delivered to his servant Moses. And to this the Scriptures themselves bear witness; for in them it is said, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God^e;" and again, "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost^f."

But they are called the word of God, not merely as being inspired by him, but also *as being a revelation of his mind and will to man*. In them his eternal counsels are opened to the world. In them he has declared in what way he will be reconciled to his offending creatures. In them he has displayed all the riches of his grace; and exhibited all his perfections as united and glorified in the person of Christ. In short, whatever could lead to the establishment of truth, or the refutation of error^g, to the correction of sin, or the promotion of righteousness, all is contained in that inspired volume, in which there is nothing superfluous, nothing defective: which therefore may be *wholly*, and *exclusively*, called, "the word of God."

But there is yet another, and a very important, ground of this appellation, namely, that the Scriptures are *the voice of God to every individual of mankind*. It is thought by some, that the Scriptures are a mere record of transactions that passed many hundred years ago; and that, however true and authentic they may be, they are no otherwise interesting to us, than as matters of curiosity and pleasing

^e 2 Tim. iii. 16.

^f 2 Pet. i. 21.

^g 2 Tim. iii. 16. Πρὸς ἑλεγχον.

instruction. Even the epistles are supposed to relate only to the particular Churches to which they were written: and thus the use of the Scriptures with respect to ourselves is wholly superseded. But we are abundantly guarded against this fatal error by the application which the inspired writers themselves make of numerous passages, which at first sight appear to be as remote from us as any in the Bible. Let us select a few, that will place this matter in its true light. First, *take an historical fact*. A contention arose in Abraham's family. His child by Hagar mocked and insulted the child which he had by Sarah. Sarah took part with her son; and desired that Hagar, with her son Ishmael, should be cast out, and no longer be suffered to dwell in Abraham's house. Now what could the children's quarrels, and the mother's revenge, have to do with *us*? The Apostle tells us, that the casting out of the bond-woman and her son was intended to shew, that they who were yet in bondage to the law, should not have any part in the inheritance of those who were made free by the Gospel^h. Next, *take an occasional declaration*. Abraham had exercised faith in God; and God declared, that his faith should be counted to him for righteousness. In what respect, it may be asked, can this apply to *us*? We answer with St. Paul, that this declaration was recorded, not for Abraham's sake alone, but for ours; to inform us, that the way of justification before God was, not by works, but by faith onlyⁱ. Next, *take a personal promise*. God, who had commissioned Joshua to destroy the Canaanites, told him that he would not leave him, nor forsake him in this arduous attempt. Would any one conceive, that that promise had any respect to *us*? Yet it had; and, in dependence upon it, every believer may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do unto me^k." Lastly, take as *insignificant an ordinance* as any that is to be found

^h Compare Gen. xxi. 10, 12. with Gal. iv. 30.

ⁱ Compare Gen. xv. 6. with Rom. iv. 3, 23, 24.

^k Compare Josh. i. 5. with Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

in all the Mosaic ritual; "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn." Now the utmost that this might be supposed to teach us, is, mercy to our beasts. But it had a further reference: God's concern was, not for oxen, but for *us*; and this ordinance was intended to declare, that all who serve at the altar, should live of the altar¹.

Let this suffice to illustrate the point in hand. You see from *an historical fact, an occasional declaration, a personal promise, and an insignificant ordinance*, that whatever the Scripture speaks, it speaks to *us*. There is not *a precept* which is not as binding upon *us* as on those to whom it was delivered: there is not *a threatening*, at which *we* have not cause to tremble; nor *a promise*, on which *we* are not warranted to rely, if only we believe in Jesus Christ.

We come now to notice that other appellation given to the Scriptures, "the sword of the Spirit." In a variety of views this description of them is just and appropriate.

It is by the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit speaks to men. He did indeed in the early ages of the world enlighten men by dreams and visions; but since the publication of the written word, and especially since the completion of the sacred canon, he has called men to the law and to the testimony^m; "they have Moses and the prophets," says our Lord, "let them hear themⁿ:" and again, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye have eternal life^o." We do not say indeed, that the Holy Spirit never uses any other means of quickening or comforting the souls of men: but the Scriptures are the means by which he usually works^p; nor does he ever work at all, but in a perfect conformity to them.

The Scriptures are further called the sword of the Spirit, *because they derive all their power from the Spirit.* In themselves, they are like a sword sheathed, and lying upon the ground: they are a dead letter:

¹ Compare Deut. xxv. 4. with 1 Cor. ix. 9, 10.

^m Isai. viii. 20.

ⁿ Luke xvi. 29.

^o John v. 39.

^p Eph. v. 26.

they convey no spiritual light : they impart no spiritual energy : they carry with them neither conviction, nor consolation : whether read or preached, they are equally without effect. Paul was conversant with the Scriptures before his conversion ; but could not see in them that Jesus was the Christ ; nor could he learn from them the temper and disposition of a child of God. The ministry of Christ was attended with but small success : nor did the number of those who were converted by the Apostles, bear any proportion to that of those who rejected their message : and, in the instances wherein they did succeed, the success was “not owing to Paul who planted, or to Apollos who watered, but to God who gave the increase^q.” The word then only came with any beneficial influence, when it came, not in word only, “but in the Holy Ghost^r,” and “in demonstration of the Spirit’s power^s :” and Lydia would have remained as unconcerned as others, if “the Lord had not opened her heart to attend to the things that were spoken^t.”

But there is yet another reason why the Scriptures are called the sword of the Spirit ; namely, that *by them he has wrought the most stupendous miracles* in the conversion of men. They are indeed, “the rod of his strength^u ;” and have effected far greater miracles than ever the rod of Moses did. By them he has changed the hearts of men instantaneously, thoroughly, abidingly. By them, in the space of one hour, he transformed three thousand murderers into the very image of their God^x. In his hands, “the word was quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword : it pierced even to the dividing of the joints and marrow : it laid open the inmost thoughts of men^y :” and “through God it is still mighty to destroy the strong-holds” of sin and Satan^z : and when “it shall have free course and be glorified in the world^a,” when he shall “gird it on his thigh, and ride on prosperously” in his career, it

^q 1 Cor. iii. 6.

^t Acts xvi. 14.

^y Heb. iv. 12.

^r 1 Thess. i. 5.

^u Ps. cx. 2.

^z 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

^s 1 Cor. ii. 4.

^x Acts ii. 41.

^a 2 Thess. iii. 1.

shall be “very sharp in the heart of the king’s enemies^b,” and all nations shall be subdued unto the obedience of faith^c.

This is the weapon with which the Christian is armed; and with which he shall conquer. To the eye of sense, indeed, he goes forth only like David, with his sling and a stone against Goliath^d: but, like him, “he shall be strong, and do exploits^e.” With *this* he is “thoroughly furnished unto all good works^f,” “nor shall any of his enemies be able to stand before him^g.”

To illustrate the virtues of this sword, we shall proceed to shew,

II. Its usefulness to him in all his combats—

It is needless to make any remarks on the utility of a sword in general, since every one must of necessity be well acquainted with it. But the particular manner in which the Scriptures answer the end of a sword to the Christian, is not so obvious. We may well therefore examine this point with care and accuracy, in order that we ourselves may be enabled to “handle the weapon” provided for us, and use it with dexterity and success.

The Christian’s enemies are the world, the flesh, and the devil. And the Scripture enables him to defeat them: first, by *its clear directions*. Does the flesh plead for any unhallowed indulgence? the Scripture says, “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good^h.” Does the world solicit his embrace? the Scripture says again, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the worldⁱ.” Does Satan exert his wiles in order to deceive? the Scripture says, “Him resist^k.” And it is worthy of remark, that it was by means of the directions of Scripture that our Saviour himself vanquished his wicked adversary. Did Satan recommend him to turn stones into bread for his support? he answered,

^b Ps. xlv. 3—5.

^c Ps. lxxii. 9—11.

^d 1 Sam. xvii. 40.

^e Dan. xi. 32.

^f 2 Tim. iii. 17.

^g Josh. x. 8.

^h Rom. xii. 9.

ⁱ 1 John ii. 15.

^k 1 Pet. v. 9.

“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God^l.” Did Satan then urge him to cast himself down from a pinnacle of the temple with an assurance of miraculous preservation? he replied again, “It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God^m.” Did Satan once more assault him with solicitations to fall down and worship him? he smote the fiend yet a third time with the same irresistible weapon: “It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serveⁿ.” Thus Jesus conquered: and thus his people in all ages have subdued *their* enemies. David tells us whence his success arose: “I have hid thy word within me, that I might not sin against thee^o,” and, “By the word of thy lips, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer^p.” To *us* also he recommends an adoption of the same plan; “Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? even by taking heed thereto according to thy word^q.”

The Scripture aids us, in the next place, by *its powerful motives*. As for all the motives that reason can suggest, the experience of all ages has proved them weak and inefficient. But the Scripture sets before us the happiness of heaven and the misery of hell: and thus with irresistible efficacy addresses itself to our hopes and fears. “He that overcometh shall inherit all things^r,” saith the Lord; “but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him: he draws back unto perdition^s.” When an enemy would allure us by the prospect of pleasure, or alarm us by the apprehension of suffering, with what indignation shall we spurn him from us, if we advert for one moment to the concerns of eternity! Shall I forego the blessedness of heaven for a momentary gratification? Shall I consign myself over to all the torments of hell rather than endure some momentary evil? What if the acqui-

^l Matt. iv. 4.^m Matt. iv. 7.ⁿ Matt. iv. 10.^o Ps. cxix. 11.^p Ps. xvii. 4.^q Ps. cxix. 9.^r Rev. xxi. 7.^s Heb. x. 38, 39.

sition be ever so precious; or the loss be ever so severe? had I not better pluck out a right eye, or cut off a right hand, than be cast into hell-fire for retaining them^t? “Depart then from me, all ye wicked; I will keep the commandments of my God^u.”

There is yet another motive that operates more strongly on an ingenuous soul than either the hope of heaven, or the fear of hell: I mean, a concern for the Divine glory. ‘Has God committed to me such a sacred trust? Is the honour of God himself dependent upon my conduct? Will my fall occasion “his name to be blasphemed;” and my stability be the means of exalting his glory? How then shall I give way to the tempter? how shall I so violate my obligations to God, and bring dishonour upon him, whom I ought to love and serve with my whole heart?’ Many of God’s saints have found this a counterpoise to the strongest temptations^x: and it is obvious that these considerations united together, are well calculated to defeat our enemies, and to secure us a decisive victory over all.

The Scripture gives us a further advantage over our enemies by means of *its rich encouragements*. Not to mention the eternal rewards that have been just adverted to, the Scripture promises that God will be with us in every conflict, and beat down our adversaries before our face. “Fear not,” says he, “for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee by the right hand of my righteousness^y.” “Fear not, thou worm Jacob, for thou shalt thresh the mountains^z.” Now what can withstand a man that is armed with such promises as these? What can oppose any effectual obstacle in his way? Are his enemies numerous? He says, “They are more that are with me, than they that

^t Mark ix. 44—49.

^u Ps. cxix. 115.

^x Gen. xxxix. 9. and xlii. 18. and Neh. v. 15.

^y Isai. xli. 10.

^z Isai. xli. 14, 15.

are against me^a.” Does he feel himself weak? he says, “God will perfect his own strength in my weakness^b.” Under these circumstances he is like to Gideon, when going against the confederate hosts of Midian and Amalek. God had promised him the victory even without the intervention of a human arm: this promise he had confirmed by repeated signs, and even by an attestation from the enemy themselves. In dependence on God, he surrounded their camp with his little band of three hundred men; and, with no other weapons than a pitcher, a lamp, and a trumpet, gained the most signal victory^c. So the Christian, “encouraging himself in his God,” and depending on his promised aid, goes forth with power and effect. The very end for which such “great and precious promises were given him was, that by them he might be a partaker of the divine nature^d,” and he does improve them to this end; and finds that by means of them he is enabled to “cleanse himself from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God^e.”

The last advantage which we shall mention as derived from the Scripture, is that which it affords us by means of *its instructive examples*. How can any one relax his determination to destroy sin, when he contemplates the destruction which sin has brought on those who yielded to its baneful influence? When he reflects on the doom of the apostate angels, or on the deluge that overwhelmed the world, or on the fire and brimstone that consumed the cities of the plain, can he trifle with that which has so greatly provoked the Majesty of heaven^f? If it be to despondency that he is urged by Satan, will he not repel the tempter instantly, as soon as he recollects the character of thousands who have found acceptance with God? Can he despair, that considers for one moment the case of David, of Manasseh^g, of the dying thief? Can he despair, who

^a 2 Kings vi. 16.

^b 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^c Judg. vii. 19.

^d 2 Pet. i. 4.

^e 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^f 2 Pet. ii. 4—6, 9.

^g 2 Kings xxi. 1—9.

sees the persecuting Saul arrested in his career; or who reads the catalogue of crimes of which the Corinthian converts had been guilty^h? It may be that he is induced to think there is something peculiar in his case, which justifies in an extraordinary degree his desponding fears. But when he hears, that "no temptation can take him but that which is common to manⁱ," and then surveys that cloud of witnesses who were once conflicting like himself, but are now in heaven attesting the power and faithfulness of a redeeming God^k, he cannot but say, "Get thee behind me, Satan^l:" "thou wast a liar, and a murderer, from the beginning^m:" and shall I credit thy lies to the disparagement of my God?

In this way it was that the saints of old triumphed: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep, that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? (Now mark the inference)—Therefore the redeemed of the Lord (and we amongst them) shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee awayⁿ." A completer triumph than this cannot possibly be conceived. Yet thus will the Scripture enable us to triumph, if we duly mark the examples which it sets before us.

In concluding this subject, we would impress upon your mind two important REFLECTIONS.

First, *How thankful should we be for the Holy Scriptures!* One of the greatest advantages that the Jews possessed above the Gentile world, was, that to them had been committed the oracles of God^o.

^h 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

ⁱ 1 Cor. x. 13.

^k Heb. xii. 1.

^l Matt. iv. 10.

^m John viii. 44.

ⁿ Isai. li. 9—11.

^o Rom. iii. 2.

This advantage we enjoy in a still higher degree ; inasmuch as we have the light of the New Testament in addition to that of the Old. To judge properly respecting this, we should put ourselves in the situation of unenlightened heathens. They are all “ led captive by the devil at his will : ” and no wonder, since they see no means of escape from his assaults, or of resistance to his power. But we, if it be not utterly our own fault, are asserting our liberty, and victoriously contending with him. Even those who are far from having attained their full growth, if only they are skilled in exercising this potent weapon, “ have overcome the wicked one^p. ” Let then the Scriptures be precious to us, “ sweeter than honey, and the honey-comb^q, ” and “ dearer than our necessary food^r. ” Let “ our meditation be in them day and night^s : ” let them be “ a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths^t. ” Let them on all occasions be “ our delight and our counsellors^u. ” Then may we be assured that they shall be “ the power of God to our salvation^x : ” for God’s promise to Joshua is, in fact, addressed to every one of us ; “ This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth ; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do all that is written therein ; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success^y. ”

Next it may be observed, *How earnestly should we seek the influences of the Holy Ghost !* Many, instead of handling the sword for the subjugating of their enemies, are really using it in their defence : they draw from the Scriptures only what shall appear to countenance their lusts and errors ; and thus “ wrest them,” as the Apostle says, “ to their own destruction^z. ” And if “ the Spirit of wisdom and revelation be not given to us^a, ” to guide us into all truth^b, we shall derive no greater benefit from the sacred volume

^p 1 John ii. 14.

^q Ps. xix. 10.

^r Job. xxiii. 12.

^s Ps. i. 2.

^t Ps. cxix. 105.

^u Ps. cxix. 24.

^x Rom. i. 17.

^y Josh. i. 8.

^z 2 Pet. iii. 16.

^a Eph. i. 17, 18.

^b John xvi. 13.

than they. We may perhaps adopt the sentiments contained in it; but we shall never experience its power to transform the soul, till “the Spirit of God write it on the fleshly tables of our hearts^c.” It is “the Lord alone that giveth wisdom; and therefore, while we search the Scriptures as for hid treasures, we must also lift up our voice to him in prayer for knowledge and understanding^d.” Let us look then to the Saviour, “out of whose mouth goeth a two-edged sword^e,” even to him who is “the Captain of the Lord’s host^f,” and beg, that he would both use that sword to slay the enmity of our hearts^g, and enable us also to wield the same for the destruction of our enemies. Let us pray that “the arms of our hands may be made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob^h.” And let us go forth, like David, “not with carnal weapons, as a sword, and a spear, and a shield, but in the name of the Lord God of hostsⁱ.” Then shall we “smite our enemies till the sword even cleave to our hands^k,” and we shall experience, in its fullest extent, the import of that significant question, “Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly^l?”

^c 2 Cor. iii. 3.^d Prov. ii. 1—6.^e Rev. i. 16.^f Josh. v. 13, 14.^g Eph. ii. 16.^h Gen. xlix. 24.ⁱ 1 Sam. xvii. 45.^k 2 Sam. xxiii. 10.^l Mic. ii. 7.

MMCXXXIV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER.

Eph. vi. 18. *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints.*

IT is graciously ordained of God that none of his creatures should be independent of him: however richly they may be furnished with either gifts or graces, they are under the necessity of receiving continual supplies from him, and of acknowledging him, from day to day, as the one source of all their benefits. Hence, in addition to the armour with

which the Christian is arrayed from head to foot, it is necessary that he wait upon God in prayer, agreeably to the direction given him in the text.

To enter into the full meaning of the Apostle's words, as connected with the foregoing context, it will be proper to shew,

I. The aspect which prayer in general bears on the Christian warfare—

II. The particular kind of prayer that will ensure to us the victory—

I. In considering the aspect which prayer in general bears on the Christian warfare, it should be noticed, that prayer is the medium of communication between God and man: it is that whereby man ascends to God, and makes known to him his wants, and gains from him whatever he stands in need of.

It is by prayer that we must obtain the armour provided for us. No one part of the divine panoply can be formed by an arm of flesh: from the first infusion of faith and hope into the soul, to the perfect transformation of the soul into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness, all is of God. He is the only “giver of every good and perfect gift^a:” and all his children in all ages have acknowledged their obligations to him in this view. The evangelical prophet confesses, “Thou hast wrought all our works in us^b,” and to the same effect the great Apostle of the Gentiles speaks; “He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing is God^c.” But how must this armour be obtained from God? Hear his own direction: “Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you^d.” Desirous as he is to impart to us all spiritual blessings, “he yet will be inquired of by us^e,” that he may bestow them on us as the reward of importunity^f. Not that he needs to be informed of our wants, for “he knoweth what things we have

^a Jam. i. 17.

^b Isai. xxvi. 12.

^c 2 Cor. v. 5.

^d Matt. vii. 7.

^e Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^f Heb. xi. 6.

need of before we ask^g;" nor needs he to be prevailed upon by the urgency of our requests; for he is far more ready to give than we are to ask, and he stirs us up to ask, because he had before determined to give^h: but there is a propriety in this divine appointment: it necessitates us not only to feel our wants, but to confess our inability to relieve ourselves: it compels us to acknowledge God as the one source of blessedness to man, and to adore him for every thing we receive at his hands. It cuts off from us all possible occasion of glorying; and obliges us, when most completely armed, to say, "By the grace of God I am what I amⁱ."

Again; *It is by prayer that we must learn how to use this armour aright.* Men are disciplined to the use of arms: it is not deemed sufficient to clothe them with armour; they must also be taught how to guard themselves against the assaults of their adversary, and at the same time to inflict on him a deadly wound. Such instruction must the Christian receive from God. If he "lean to his own understanding," he will as surely be foiled, as if he trust in his own strength, or go unarmed to the field of battle. Many are the devices of the wicked one, of which the uninstructed Christian cannot be aware. He alone, "to whom all things are naked and open," knows his plots, or can put us sufficiently on our guard against them. He alone can tell us when, and where, and how to strike^k. With him alone is that "wisdom that is profitable to direct^l." But if we call upon him, "he will guide us by his counsel^m:" he will "give us a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and of might, a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and will make us quick of understanding in the fear of the Lordⁿ." He will inform us of the designs of our enemy^o, and shew us how to counteract them^p. And though in ourselves we be "unskilful in the word of right-

^g Matt. vi. 8.

^k 2 Sam. v. 23—25.

ⁿ Isai. xi. 2, 3.

^h John iv. 10.

^l Eccl. x. 10.

^o Luke xxii. 31.

ⁱ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^m Ps. lxxiii. 24.

^p Josh. viii. 6—8.

eousness^q,” yet will he “give us the tongue of the learned^r,” and the arm of the mighty^s: he will fight in us, as well as for us^t,” and will give us reason to adopt the grateful acknowledgments of that renowned warrior, “Blessed be the Lord, my strength, who teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight^u.” Still, however, must this be sought of him in prayer. His promise is suspended on this condition, that we pray to him for the performance of it: on our fulfilling this duty, he will interpose; “he will be very gracious unto us at the voice of our cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer us:” and *then* it is that “our ears shall hear a voice behind us, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it^x.” We must first “acknowledge him, and then he will direct our paths^y.”

Once more—*It is by prayer that we must bring down the Divine blessing on our endeavours.* Many noble purposes are formed in the minds of unregenerate men, which yet are “as the grass that groweth on the house-tops, wherewith the mower filleth not his arms, neither he that bindeth up the sheaves, his bosom.” Nor is it any wonder that those efforts should be blasted, which are undertaken without a reference to God, and which, if they succeeded, would confirm men in a conceit of their own sufficiency. God is a jealous God: and “his glory will he not give to another.” Hence he is interested, as it were, in disconcerting the plans of those who disregard him, and in prospering the concerns of those who humbly implore his aid. Agreeably to this, we find in the sacred records that the most powerful armaments, and best concerted projects, have been defeated, when God was not acknowledged^z; and that the weaker have triumphed gloriously, when they sought the Divine favour and protection^a. In one instance more particularly we

^q Heb. v. 13.

^r Isai. l. 4.

^s 2 Sam. xxii. 33—35.

^t Isai. xlix. 25.

^u Ps. cxliv. 1.

^x Isai. xxx. 19, 21.

^y Prov. iii. 5, 6.

^z Isai. xxxvii. 36. 2 Sam. xvii. 11—13.

^a 2 Chron. xx. 12, 25.

see the prayer of faith blended with human exertions: and it was made manifest, for the instruction of that and all future generations, that, whatever means God himself might use, prayer was the most powerful of all weapons. When the hands of Moses hanged down through weariness, Amalek prevailed over Israel; but when he held up his hands, Israel prevailed over Amalek^b; so that, in fact, it was the prayer of Moses, rather than the sword of Joshua, that gained the victory. It is in this way also that we must vanquish our spiritual enemies. We must fight against them indeed, and seek their utter destruction; but our reliance must be altogether upon God, whose blessing we must obtain in a way of prayer. In vain shall we attempt to combat Satan in any other way. He laughs at an arm of flesh; and yields to Omnipotence alone. To him may be justly applied that lofty description of Leviathan; "Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons, or his head with fish-spears? Behold, the hope of him is vain: shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him? His scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal. His heart is as firm as a stone, yea, as hard as a piece of the nether mill-stone. The sword of him that layeth at him cannot hold, the spear, the dart, nor the harbergeon. He esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood. Darts are counted by him as stubble; he laugheth at the shaking of the spear. He is king over all the children of pride^c." But prayer he cannot withstand; the man who fights upon his knees is sure to vanquish him: and the weakest Christian in the universe, if he has but a heart to pray, may say with David, "I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised, and so shall I be saved from mine enemies^d."

To prevent mistakes, however, it will be proper to shew,

II. What kind of prayer that is that will secure to us the victory—

^b Exod. xvii. 11.

^c Job xli. 7, 9, 15, 24, 26, 27, 29, 34.

^d 2 Sam. xxii. 4.

Much that is called prayer is utterly unworthy of that sacred name. That which alone will prevail to the extent of our necessities, must be *comprehensive, spiritual, persevering*.

It must, in the first place, be *comprehensive*. In the text, mention is made of supplication, and of intercession: both of which are necessary in their season. Of SUPPLICATIONS, there are some *stated*, such as those which we offer regularly in the Church, the family, and the closet; others are *occasional*; and are presented to God at those intervals, when any particular occurrence, whether prosperous or adverse, renders it necessary to obtain some special interposition of the Deity. INTERCESSIONS are those prayers which we offer *for others*; and which are intended to bring down blessings either on *the world at large* (for God commands “intercession to be made for all men, and more especially for kings, and all that are in authority^e”) or on *the saints in particular*, with whom we have a common interest; and amongst whom, as amongst soldiers in the same army, there should exist a solicitude to promote to the uttermost each other’s safety and welfare.

Now it is by a regular application to God, in all these ways, that we are to procure from heaven those seasonable supplies which we stand in need of. Respecting the customary devotions of *the closet*, both in the morning and the evening, corresponding to the sacrifices that were daily offered to God under the Mosaic law^f, there can be no doubt. A man who neglects them has no pretension to the Christian name. Instead of being in a state of friendship with God, he must rather be numbered amongst his enemies; for the very description given of his enemies is, that they call not upon God^g; whereas the character of his friends is, that “they are a people near unto him^h.” Nor is it less necessary that we should worship God *in our families*: for, as we have family wants, and family mercies, it is proper that we should

^e 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

^g Ps. xiv. 4.

^f Exod. xxix. 38, 39, 42.

^h Ps. cxlviii. 14.

“offer the sacrifices of prayer and praise” in concert with our families. Abraham is commended for his attention to the religious concerns of his familyⁱ: and Joshua’s noble resolution to maintain, both in his own soul and in his family, the worship of the true God^k, clearly shews, how important this part of a Christian’s duty was considered among the saints of old. Nor can any expect the blessing of God upon their families, who will not unite with them in acknowledging the mercies they have already received. As for *the public worship* of God, none who have any regard for God’s honour in the world can possibly neglect it.

The importance of *occasional* prayer may perhaps be not so clearly seen. But are there not frequent occasions when we need in a more especial manner the assistance of God? If any thing have occurred that is gratifying to flesh and blood, do we not need to call upon God for grace, that we may not, Jeshurun like, “wax fat, and kick” against our heavenly Benefactor? If, on the contrary, we are suddenly involved in any afflictive circumstances, do we not need to implore help from God, in order that we may bear with patience his paternal chastisements, and that the trial may be sanctified to our eternal good? Sometimes indeed the seasons occur so instantaneously, that we have no time or opportunity for a long address to God: but then we might lift up our hearts in an ejaculatory petition; and in one short moment obtain from God the succour we require. Look at the saints of old, and see how they prospered by a sudden elevation of their souls to God: David, by one short prayer, “Lord, turn the counsels of Ahithophel into foolishness,” defeated the crafty advice *he* gave to Absalom: and caused him, through chagrin, to put a period to his own existence^l. Jehoshaphat, by a single cry, turned back his pursuers, who, if God had not instantly

ⁱ Gen. xviii. 19.^k Josh. xxiv. 15.^l 2 Sam. xv. 31. with xvii. 14, 23.

interposed on his behalf, would have overtaken and destroyed him^m. Nehemiah, by a silent lifting up of his soul to God, obtained success to the petition which he was about to offer to his royal masterⁿ. Thus we should blunt the edge of many temptations, and defeat innumerable machinations of Satan, if we habituated ourselves on all occasions to make known our requests to God. Nor would prayer be less successful, if offered for others. Who can behold Moses repeatedly arresting the hand of justice, and averting the wrath of God from the whole Jewish nation^o; or contemplate Peter's deliverance from prison on the night preceding his intended execution, effected as it was in a way that appeared incredible even to the very people who had been praying for it^p, and not confess the efficacy of intercession, whether of people for their minister, or of ministers for their people? Indeed we need no other instance than that of Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Gomorrha^q, to convince us, that it is our most glorious privilege to "pray one for another;" and that in neglecting this duty, we "sin against God^s," and against our brethren, and against our own souls.

Such then must be our prayers, if we would be "good soldiers of Jesus Christ," or exert ourselves with effect against our great adversary.

In the next place, our prayer must be *spiritual*. Were our devotions multiplied in ever so great a degree, they would be of no avail, unless they came from the heart, and were offered up "through the power of the Holy Ghost." God has warned us, that "they who draw nigh to him with their lips while their hearts are far from him, worship him in vain^t." Indeed how can we imagine that God should regard a mere repetition of words, when we ourselves should reject with indignation a petition offered to ourselves in a similar manner^u? Our "supplications must be

^m 2 Chron. xviii. 31.

^o Exod. xxxii. 10—14.

^q Gen. xviii. 23—32.

^s 1 Sam. xii. 23.

ⁿ Neh. ii. 4—6.

^p Acts xii. 5—16.

^r Jam. v. 16.

^u Mal. i. 8.

^t Matt. xv. 8, 9.

in the Spirit," or, as St. Jude expresses it, "in the Holy Ghost^x." The Holy Ghost must teach us what to pray for, and must assist our infirmities in praying for it^y, quickening our desires after God, emboldening us to draw nigh to him with filial confidence, and enabling us to expect at his hands an answer of peace. As there is but one Mediator *through* whom we can have access to God, so there is only one Spirit *by* whom we can approach him^z. But we need not on this account be discouraged: for the Spirit is promised to us for these ends^a; and in whomsoever he is "a Spirit of grace, he will be also a Spirit of supplication^b."

Lastly, our prayer must also be *persevering*: we must pray "always, watching thereunto with all perseverance." It is by no means sufficient that we pray to God, as too many do, just under the pressure of some heavy affliction^c, or be fervent for a time, and then relapse again into our former coldness and formality^d. We must be "instant in prayer^e," "stirring up our souls to lay hold on God^f," and "wrestling with him," like Jacob, till we obtain his blessing^g. There is a holy importunity which we are to use, like that of the Canaanitish woman^h, or that of the two blind men, who became more urgent in proportion as others strove to repress their ardourⁱ. And because Satan will do all in his power to divert us from this course, we must watch against his devices with all possible care, and persevere in it without fainting^k, even to the end. If we notice our frames at the returning seasons of prayer, we shall perceive that there is often a most unaccountable backwardness to this duty. Any concern, however trifling, will appear a sufficient reason for delaying it, till, from weariness of body or indisposition of mind, we are induced to omit it altogether, or perhaps

^x Jude, ver. 20.^y Rom. viii. 26.^z Eph. ii. 18.^a Joel ii. 29, 32.^b Zech. xii. 10.^c Isai. xxvi. 16.^d Job xxvii. 10.^e Rom. xii. 12.^f Isai. lxiv. 7.^g Gen. xxxii. 24—28. with Hos. xii. 4.^h Matt. xv. 22—27. ⁱ Matt. xx. 30, 31.^k Luke xviii. 1.

we fall asleep in the midst of it. We sometimes think in the evening, that we shall be fitter for it in the morning; and then in the morning we expect a more convenient season at noon-day; and at noon-day we look forward with a hope of performing our duty to more advantage in the evening; and thus we deceive ourselves with delays, and rob our souls of the benefits which God would bestow upon them. But who ever found himself the more ready for prayer on account of his having neglected it the preceding day? Do not such neglects “grieve the Holy Spirit,” and increase, rather than diminish, our indisposition for prayer? Most assuredly they do: and therefore we should “watch” against all excuses, all neglects, all formality; and “persevere” in a steady, uniform, and conscientious performance of this duty. It is not necessary indeed that we should at all times occupy the same space of time in our devotions; for “we shall not be heard for our much speaking¹,” but we should endeavour at all times to maintain a spirituality of mind in this duty, and improve in a more particular manner those seasons, when God stretches out to us, as it were, his golden sceptre^m, and admits us to a more than ordinary “fellowship with himself and with his Son Jesus Christⁿ.”

We shall conclude this interesting subject with an
ADDRESS,

1. *To those who neglect prayer—*

What easier terms could God have prescribed, than those on which he has suspended the communication of his blessings? or what could you yourselves have dictated to him more favourable than that condition, “Ask, and you shall have?” Do but consider, what will be your reflections as soon as ever you enter into the invisible world! When you see the door of mercy for ever shut, and begin to feel the judgments which you would not

¹ Matt. vi. 7.

^m Esth. iv. 11. with v. 2, 3.

ⁿ 1 John. i. 3.

deprecate, how will you lament, and even curse, your folly in neglecting prayer ! When you call to mind, that heaven with all its glory was open to you, and you had nothing to do but to ask for it at the hands of God, you would not give yourselves the trouble to call upon him ! what can you expect, but that the threatening, already recorded for your instruction, shall be executed upon you ; “ Because I called, and ye refused, I stretched out my hand, and ye regarded me not ; but ye set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof ; I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh : when your fear cometh as a desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind ; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall ye call upon me, but I will not answer ; ye shall seek me early, but ye shall not find me ; for that ye hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord : therefore shall ye eat of the fruit of your own way, and be filled with your own devices^o. ” O let not this awful period arrive ! “ Arise, ye sleepers, and call upon your God^p. ” Is not heaven worth asking for ? Is it not worth your while to escape the miseries of hell ? What if diligence and self-denial be necessary ; will not the prize repay the labours of the contest ? Perhaps you are saying in your hearts, that you will begin to pray at some future, and more convenient, season^q : but dream not of a more convenient season, lest that season never arrive. Procrastination is the ruin of thousands, and of millions. It is Satan’s grand device for keeping you from God. Should he tempt you to say, “ I will never pray at all,” he knows you would revolt at the idea ; and therefore he prompts you only to defer it in hopes of finding your mind better disposed to the employment on some future day. But let him not deceive you. Delay not a single hour. Yea, at this very moment lift up that ejaculatory petition, “ Lord, teach us to pray^r : ” and embrace the first moment to begin that

^o Prov. i. 24—31.^q Acts xxiv. 25.^p Jonah i. 6.^r Luke xi. 1.

work, which if prosecuted with fervour and perseverance, shall issue in present peace, and everlasting triumphs.

2. *To those who are daily waiting upon their God,* we would also address a few words—

That you find much cause for humiliation in your secret walk with God, is highly probable: for though nothing would be easier than prayer, if you were altogether spiritual, the remaining carnality of your hearts renders it inexpressibly difficult. Nor can we doubt but that Satan labours to the uttermost to increase your discouragements, both by distracting your minds in prayer, and by insinuating, that your labour will be in vain. And too often are you inclined perhaps to credit his suggestions, and to say, like the unbelieving Jews, “What profit should we have, if we pray unto him^s?” he will not hear: “he has shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure.” But rest assured that he will not suffer you to seek his face in vain. His answers may be delayed; but they shall come in the best time. You have only to wait; and the vision, though it may tarry for a season, will not ultimately disappoint you^t. Sooner or later, “God will assuredly avenge his own elect^u.” There is no situation so desperate but prayer will relieve us from it^x: no object is so far beyond the reach of human influence, but prayer will attain it^y. The efficacy of prayer is as unlimited as Omnipotence itself, because it will bring Omnipotence to our aid^z.

But some are ready to say, “I have prayed, and earnestly too; and yet have obtained no answer to my prayer.” It may be so; because you have “asked amiss^a,” or because the time for answering it is not yet arrived. But it often happens, that persons think their prayers are cast out, when they have indeed received an answer to them, yea, the best

^s Job xxi. 15.

^t Hab. ii. 3.

^u Luke xviii. 7.

^x Jonah ii. 2—7.

^y Jam. v. 17, 18.

^z John xiv. 13, 14.

^a Jam. iv. 3.

answer that could have been given to them. Perhaps, like Paul, they have prayed against a thorn in their flesh; and, instead of having it removed, have received strength to bear it, and grace to improve it to their spiritual good^b. But is this no answer to their prayer? Is it not the best that could possibly be vouchsafed? A trial may be removed in wrath^c; but it cannot be sanctified from any other principle than love^d. The removal of it may produce present ease; but its sanctified operations will ensure and enhance our everlasting felicity^e.

Let us then “tarry the Lord’s leisure, and be strong,” knowing that the prayer of faith can never go forth in vain; nor can a praying soul ever perish. Let us “in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make our requests known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus^f.”

^b 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

^c Isai. i. 5.

^d Heb. xii. 10.

^e 2 Cor. iv. 17.

^f Phil. iv. 6, 7.

END OF VOL. XVII.

